

**The Csángó in Ghimeș-Făget:  
Boundary and Ethnic Definition in Transylvania**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James M. Nyce', is written over a horizontal line.

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**Abstract:**

A short ethnographic field study in Transylvania led to interesting questions about self-identification in a traditionally multi-ethnic region—one that has been contested for most of the region's history. The complicated and dichotomous accounts of Transylvania's history and the development of national consciousness in the two nations (Hungary and Romania) who claim the region are examined. This framework contextualizes the issues surrounding an enigmatic and equally contested ethnic minority found in the Ghimeș-Făget area of Transylvania. The Csángó have been rejected and claimed by both nations throughout history, but lack internal definition and presently do not often self-identify in society. The information gained through field study observation and interviews is analyzed following a discussion of the historical contestation of Transylvania and the Csángó found in the English literature.

**Acknowledgements:**

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## **I. Introduction: a field study in Transylvania**

From May 22 to June 8, 2008, a group of anthropology students went with Dr. James M. Nyce and Dr. Gail Bader to Transylvania, a region in north central Romania, with the intent of learning how to conduct a village field study. In Ghimeș-Făget,<sup>1</sup> we hoped to study the transitions and changes a small Romanian village was experiencing after the country joined the European Union in 2007. The status of modernity and tradition and how the concepts were defined and understood by the villagers provided a baseline for this study. From our outsider's perspective as Americans, visual reminders of what seemed to us to be both a coexistence and dichotomy of modernity and tradition abounded. Families making hay in the field with scythes might pause to answer a cell phone. Horse drawn carts full of timber shared the main road with semitrailers barreling through the village at breakneck speed. Another focus for the research groups' ethnographic interviews involved self-identification: Hungarian and Romanian identification in a historically multi-ethnic region. This eventually led us to focus on an enigmatic ethnic minority in the area called the Csángó.<sup>2</sup> These foci were considered at first to be separate and unconnected.

As researchers in a foreign environment, it is natural we would begin our research relating and understanding concepts and ideas we found in Ghimeș-Făget in terms of what was familiar to us. For example, modernity and tradition comparisons were made in terms of our 20<sup>th</sup> century understandings of "development": essentially mechanization and technological advancement. The investigation of self-identification, Romanian, Hungarian, or Csángó, and the discovery of some Hungarians' continued resentment over the territorial loss of Transylvania to Romania did not initially coincide with our conceptualization of modernity and tradition. Our

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<sup>1</sup> A group of several small inter-related villages. Hungarian name: Gyimesbükk. See Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> Alternate Anglicized spelling: Chango.

initial etic approach changed and led us to discover the complicated coexistence and different contextualization of modernity and tradition present in Ghimeș-Făget, issues which we began to recognize and pursue as our understandings and perspectives evolved.

By broadening our scope with further interviews, reading, and discussion, and considering the complicated history of Transylvania, we discovered technological advancement was not necessarily the most relevant or interesting way to frame our questioning of modernity and tradition. Villagers self-identified with Hungarian and Romanian ethnicities that share an understanding of Transylvania as their respective cultural homeland, but these understandings contest the region's borders, although it is currently part of Romania. Expanding our ideas of tradition and modernity to include the persistence of ancient claims to land and the issues of multiple ethnicities within a common modern geopolitical border provided a better frame of reference in which to formulate our questions later in the field study.

The expression of the Csángó ethnicity is an element of the mutual Romanian and Hungarian emphasis on Transylvania as a cultural center. The Csángó persist in a rural archaic lifestyle—they are considered relics of a Medieval Transylvania—and thus can be viewed as conservers of culture and tradition. For much of history, they were distinct from the mainstream society of both Hungarians and Romanians. They remained isolated from Hungary during the nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that shaped the emergence of that modern nation and the national identity of its citizens. They were sequestered from Romanians in Transylvania and Moldavia because of their Catholic religion among Romanian Orthodox society with its different way of life. This isolation enabled them to maintain culture and traditions Hungarians and Romanians feel are absent in their respective modern societies. The Csángó are valued by outsiders and have come to embody a romanticized peasant lifestyle and preserved culture of the past to mainstream

Transylvanian society, but have had difficulty defining themselves and transitioning as an ethnicity into the modern sociopolitical world.

The Csángó ethnicity and the region of Transylvania are products of a long lineage of complex and contradictory versions of history. Both are contested and claimed by Romanians and Hungarians. The self-identification and persistence of a Csángó minority, though theoretical if it proves nonexistent at local levels in the “borderland”<sup>3</sup> region of Transylvania, is the subject of this thesis. A necessary contextualization is provided by a summary of the history of the region in the Romanian and Hungarian views and the history and claims over the Csángó ethnicity. This precedes the analysis and discussion of the status of Csángó in Ghimeș-Făget: their self-identification, the circumstances surrounding the assumption of this identity, and the implications it has in a contemporary Transylvanian village.

## II. A brief history of the contested region of Transylvania

*In order to celebrate one's past as unique or to reject it as outright alien, history has been manipulated and contested by nationalist elites to justify territorial integrity and gains. In this history the involved parties needed a place to locate events and characters within, and nothing served this better than the remote border zone. For the nationalist minds, this place is even imbued with a heightened sense of symbolism, for it is connected to the formation of the nation and the turning points of that history.... (Kürti 17)*

Attempting to make sense of the immense body of conflicting literature surrounding the history and rights to Transylvania is a daunting task. The historically multi-ethnic Transylvania

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<sup>3</sup> László Kürti describes the modern nation state boundary as “always in motion” in The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination.

region has been part of a spectrum of empires and republics. While dates can be stated objectively and geographic borders outlined, the details of how each transaction occurred and who was just in various historical situations has been dichotomous. Indeed, the modern nations of Romania and Hungary share a tightly intertwined history, of which there are two distinct versions.

Each nation claims to be descended from ancient peoples whom they both claim to have been in Transylvania first. Each harbors strong emotional connections to the region, feeling Transylvania is the “cradle” of their own respective culture. Speakers of each language have oppressed speakers of the other in alternating historical periods politically, socially, and religiously. Accumulation of centuries of bitterness for the laundry lists of wrongs each people has inflicted upon the other lasts to this day with some, but not all, members of each respective nation, and appear insurmountable. In addition, while the nations’ armies are not facing off, the debate and discontent over who truly has more right to Transylvania is ongoing, although the region has been part of Romania for almost a century.<sup>4</sup>

Romania and Hungary are two nations with a very ancient ax to grind. They contest a border, which in some objective sense, should be fixed. With this understanding it is no surprise “histography” and nationalistic literatures reflect political agendas. Even when drawn from the same historical source material, two versions, the Hungarian and the Romanian, tend to contradict each other. The following section will attempt to first describe the area traditionally

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<sup>4</sup> On our last night in Ghimeș-Făget (Wednesday June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008), we witnessed a peaceful and symbolic protest of the “loss” of Transylvania to Romania following WWI (the Treaty of Trianon, signed June 4, 1920 finalized Hungary’s post-war borders; parts of Transylvania were unified with the Kingdom of Romania earlier in 1918 “union of Transylvania with Hungary”- December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918). According to the Catholic Priest, fires were made all along the Transylvanian border on this night as a symbol of remembrance (Transcription. June 5, 2008, Szocs 2). **Transcriptions of the interviews and the field notes from the Ghimeș-Făget field study have been compiled in a common corpus available online with limited access <http://www.onehandlaughing.com/Ghimes/home.html> . All further interview or field note citations are from this corpus. Field notes are cited only when the informant did not want the interview to be recorded, or if the recording could not be transcribed.**



considered to be Transylvania and the political transactions that took place, causing the frequent shifting of borders. Then, the opposing historical claims to the region and the development of national consciousness will be discussed.

### **A. Geography of Transylvania and Ghimeș-Făget**

The modern day Romanian nation currently encompasses the historic area known as Transylvania, which is the northwestern region of Romania.<sup>5</sup> Two other cultural regions and former principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia, buffer Transylvania to the south and east. Transylvania is part of the Carpathian basin, which has influenced its role within the European community significantly throughout history (de Czege 8). The Carpathian Mountains to the east and the Transylvanian Alps to the south encircle the Transylvanian basin and separate it from the Plain of Moldavia (east) and the Wallachian Plain (south) (Romania: Geography). According to Nyugat, historically Transylvania referred only to the Transylvanian basin and area of approximately 56,000 sq. km, but currently is generally meant to refer to all former Hungarian territory ceded to Romania post WWI with the Treaty of Trianon. This included approximately 103,000 sq. km, as well as Maramureș, former eastern Hungary, and the Banat region to the south, in addition to historical Transylvania (Appendices C-E) (38).

Within Transylvania, Ghimeș-Făget is an area of six small villages with a population of approximately 5,400 in the Trotuș (or Ghimeș) valley on the historic Moldovian-Transylvanian border (Appendices F; H; I) (Kapalo 4). These closely related villages, Făget being the largest with a population of approximately 1,300, are called a “commune.” Ghimeș-Făget is in Harghita County, which has the highest percentage of Hungarians in Romania. The area is a historically significant mountain pass within the Eastern Carpathians, specifically the Ciucului Mountains,

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<sup>5</sup> Transylvania is also the name of a current administrative region, with slightly different parameters than the historic region. See Appendix A-C.

and along the Trotuș River, that served as a transit-way for goods between Moldova and Transylvania. A short walk from the pension where we stayed during the field study stood the ruins of a 17<sup>th</sup> century customs checkpoint and fortifications, named Rákóczi for a member of that Hungarian dynasty. This served as a checkpoint between Ghimeș and the neighboring village of Palanka—formerly in Moldova (Ghimeș-Făget Area, a Short Presentation).

## **B. A transitory border**

Transylvania has endured multiple invaders, foreign rulers, and expansions and retractions of territory. The following will outline the historical events that altered the geographical boundaries of Transylvania and the different government claims of jurisdiction over Transylvania.

### **1. Ancient occupation to the medieval era**

The ancient historian Herodotus relayed an account of an individual who lived in Transylvania and encountered a people called Dacians as early as 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., but most sources generally agree Dacians inhabited the Transylvania region and had a developed civilization and kingdom at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. After the Dacians' defeat by Trajan, before he was Roman Emperor, the area became a Roman province (called Dacia) during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (C.E.).<sup>6</sup> Concomitant Roman abandonment of the region<sup>7</sup> and invasions by Goths and others led to a period of ambiguity in the region without any overarching sovereignty since the Dacian Kingdom had been destroyed (Kovrig 21). According to Kovrig, there was scant evidence of ethnic Romanian presence when the Hungarians (Magyars) settled

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<sup>6</sup> According to Romanians, local Geto-Dacians (Vlachs) and Roman colonists are the ancestors of Romanians, this is used to support Romanians' claim to Transylvania (Kovrig 31).

<sup>7</sup> In 271 C.E. Dacia was one of the first provinces from which Rome withdrew (Nyugat 39).

Transylvania in the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup> (31). Transylvania would be a voivodeship<sup>9</sup> of the Hungarian Kingdom from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A county system developed similar to that of Hungary in Western Transylvania, but because of distance and the need to defend borders, other systems of administration were created in the rest of Transylvania which the Hungarian kings claimed. In exchange for loyalty and defense of the borders, they granted privileges to the Székely,<sup>10</sup> who they sent to settle in the east in the late 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Saxons, invited to settle and defend the south in the late 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Nyugat 41). These two groups were part of the Hungarian Kingdom, but autonomous.<sup>11</sup> Transylvania had “special administrative status,” again due to the distance from the central Hungarian government, and a governor there represented the authority of the king (Nyugat 42). The privileged medieval population soon consisted of the so-called three nations of Transylvania: Székely, Magyars, and Saxons. The Romanians were generally landless peasants but social mobility and consequential assimilation with the Hungarian boyars (nobility and land holders) was possible (Kovrig 31).

## 2. Empires

Following its membership in the Hungarian Kingdom, two empires exercised control over the region: the Ottoman Turk and Habsburg Empires. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Transylvania became a quasi-independent principality of the Ottoman Turk Empire, and thus the “last bastion

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<sup>8</sup>The demographic soon changed when Romanians from Moldavia and Wallachia migrated during the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Kovrig 31).

<sup>9</sup> Hungarian: *vajdaság*, a medieval administrative division, district, or province governed by a voivode (literal meaning: “the one who leads the warriors”), a type of military commander usually close in rank to the ruler (voivodeship. def. OED).

<sup>10</sup> Termed “ethnic cousins” of the Magyar by Kovrig (31), the Székely were settled in Transylvania from other parts of Hungary (Nyugat 41) and are generally considered distinct from Magyar in language and culture although Lehrer calls them “not so much a tribe as a profession” that represents a social class of mercenaries granted privileges for their help in maintaining order (15). Spelling variations in the literature include Sécklers, Széklers, and Szeklers.

<sup>11</sup>“...They were granted a high degree of self-government and economic privileges.” The Saxons had citizen status and the Székely belonged to the noble class and did not have to pay taxes but “had an obligation to answer the king’s call to arms” (Nyugat 41).

of Hungary's political and cultural survival" (Kovrig 32). The former Hungarian Kingdom had acquiesced to Ottoman control with the fall of Buda in 1541 and the Hungarian territory was divided (Kürti 14). Because the southeastern Transylvanian principality was able to remain autonomous under Turkish tutelage, it was seen as a "repository of Hungarian cultural independence" and the "stronghold" of Hungarian identity for a long period. This led to the idea of Transylvania as "the seat of Hungarian authenticity," a sentiment that lingers today and in fact drives the market for Hungarian tourism in Transylvania, including Ghimeș-Făget (Csenkey 16).

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century Hungary was liberated from Ottoman control, but some of the liberated territory, such as Transylvania, became part of the Habsburg Empire<sup>12</sup> (Csenkey 17). Transylvania also had privileges and separate status under Habsburg administration until 1867 when the region was reunited with Hungary—a result of the Compromise of 1867 between the Habsburgs and Hungarians (Nyugat 50). All legal distinctions between ethnic groups were supposedly discounted at this time (Kovrig 32). "Almost 300 years of autonomy were brought to an end...including the abolition of the Transylvanian parliament" (Nyugat 50). Transylvania would remain part of the dual monarchic union of Austria and Hungary until 1918.

### **3. Post WWI through the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the end of WWI, Transylvania in its entirety was incorporated in the newly-formed Romanian state officially with the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, although some parts were "unified" with Romania in 1918 (Kürti 15). Aside from Hitler's brief revision of the treaty's borders with the Vienna Diktat (1940-44),<sup>13</sup> Transylvania has officially remained part of Romania since the end of WWI.

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<sup>12</sup> "As part of the war to free Hungary from Turkish rule, the Habsburg army invaded Transylvania in 1687 and it became part of the Empire" (Nyugat 46).

<sup>13</sup> On August 30th, 1940 with the "Second Vienna Award", Hungary regained some 40% of area granted to Romania at Trianon. This included a part of northern Transylvania that was most heavily occupied by Magyars (Kovrig 38).

The constant upheaval and border revisions Romania and Hungary have endured begins to elucidate the continued territorial complaints of loss and rightful ownership into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Mandelbaum, in The New European Diasporas: National Minorities and Conflict in Eastern Europe, elaborates in just the 20<sup>th</sup> century the region has witnessed state creation and demise three times of three “empires”: “the dynastic ones of Central and Eastern Europe after WWI, the overseas empires of the Western World after WWII, and the communist empires of Europe after the Cold War.” Mandelbaum continues “each upheaval altered the international norm governing the determination of borders” (10). The dynastic empires followed the philosophy of “more is better,” conquered land, and drew borders by means of military might disregarding any ethnic or religious continuity. This manner of claiming land with no regard for the inhabitants changed at the end of WWI when members of the Paris Peace Conference endeavored to follow Willsonian principles and proclaimed ethnicity and history would be considered in redrawing and creating independent nations from areas formerly subordinate to the Austro Hungarian crown. At the 1919 conference “...dominant consideration was supposed to be justice, defined as fulfillment of national aspirations...[and] national principle<sup>14</sup> was formally introduced as the basis for sovereignty” (Mandelbaum 10). However, this principle was not so easily applied to the vast and diverse territory of Eastern Europe. In addition, “the problem of unity also implies a geographical mythology. If nations are predestined, then there must be a geographical predestination, well-defined space, marked out by clear borders, which has been reserved for them from the beginning” (Boia 132). Wilson had hoped that the borders drawn would be “right” and end all conflict; unfortunately, this was not the case.

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<sup>14</sup> national principle: “The belief that national groups—generally defined by common language or religion, or ethnicity, or sense of political community, or some combination of them—should have their own states has embedded itself in thinking of peoples everywhere and to a great extent in international practice...[however] few countries consist entirely of one nation; not every self-described nation has its own state; and not every nation is gathered into a single state....” (Mandelbaum 1)

The committee at Trianon failed to consider that the areas they were trying to divide into “modern” political nations, unlike some of Western Europe, lacked “well-defined space” and pockets of homogeneity in regard to ethnicity, culture, and interpretation of history. Instead these areas exhibited the legacy of fallen dynasties that had ruled them in the “mixed demographic patterns” that were common in imperial Europe (Mandelbaum 11). “Justice, defined as fulfillment of national aspirations” was impossible to deliver to all peoples in all areas of the multi-varied ethnic, religious, and historically diverse territory once controlled by kingdoms and multi-national empires.<sup>15</sup>

The inability to consistently apply national principle when redrawing Europe is exemplified in the case of Transylvania, where this was complicated by the medieval legacy of three privileged “nations.” Transylvania was also a uniquely autonomous and self-governing area until the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and reintegration with Hungary. Throughout political changes, the multiple ethnicities have persisted and each attempts to validate their claims to the same territory with different versions of history, historiography, and origin myths that “prove” they are the initial inhabitants and therefore the only people justified in wanting or having geopolitical control and ownership of Transylvania. Such a multivariate legacy did not coalesce well with the development of modern nations and creation of political borders. Transylvania was never mono-cultural, thus it is unreasonably optimistic to assume all the parties involved would be satisfied when allotting territory to one or the other nations. As a further complication, populations are intermingled; it would not be possible “to place all Hungarians in one jurisdiction without including a substantial number of Romanians” and vice versa, leading to a

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<sup>15</sup> In addition, Mandelbaum argues “For all the revolutionary implications of the introduction of the national principle as the basis for sovereignty, moreover, there were, at Paris, important elements of continuity with the imperial past. The great powers retained the prerogative of deciding where borders were to be drawn.” This prerogative was to some extent still in force following WWII (11).

large number of Hungarians in the “new” Romanian state (Mandelbaum 11). None of the parties are willing to relinquish their historically-based claim to this highly valued, culturally rich territory. Additionally, we can assume this may not have been simply ideological, but compounded by economic factors as well. This struggle may have equally been for Transylvania’s assets—lumber, land, and the passable, fertile valleys in the Carpathians such as the Ghimeș or Trotuș Valley where our field study was conducted.

Despite noble attempts not to draw borders arbitrarily, “new” minorities or “new diasporas...[were] created by movement not of people but of borders,”<sup>16</sup> and the permanence of the post-war political borders assumed by governments and outsiders would be subject to challenge (Mandelbaum vii). To the affected minorities, the borders were considered unjust and impermanent, devoid of meaning and dissimilar to their ideas of more appropriate historical or culturally defined boundaries. Indeed, much of the turmoil in Eastern Europe following the remaking of borders after the World Wars and the end of the communist era originate from the consequential creation of new diasporas and the post WWI attempts to idealistically carve peaceful modern nations from complex multi-ethnic areas with no shared “national principle.”<sup>17</sup>

### C. Versions of history—claims to Transylvania

*She thought that the problem with the literature on this topic was that each party [Romanian and Hungarian] would try to “pull the blanket from side to side [to their side].” (Romanian Librarian)<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> The borders were so often moved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that “someone born near the Carpathian mountains in 1918 could, if he or she had lived to the age of 73, have been a Habsburg, then a Czechoslovak, Soviet, and finally a Ukrainian citizen, all without ever leaving home” (Mandelbaum 15).

<sup>17</sup> “... interaction of these minorities, the new states in which they are located, and the homeland states where their co-nationals predominate and from which they have been separated is leading cause of large-scale conflict in the wake of the collapse of communism” (Mandelbaum introduction vii).

<sup>18</sup> Field Notes, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Klimaszewski 20; Spotts 31. See footnote 4.

## 1. Romanian

The view that Transylvania is inherently Romanian and that any Hungarian claims are based on subjugation by armies of Hungarian tribes that invaded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century is best expressed in Milton Lehrer's partisan book Transylvania, History and Reality.<sup>19</sup> According to Lehrer, Romanians were diminished to serf status under Hungarian rule and subjected to programs of "Magyarization" (Hungarianization) such as the Apponyi law of 1907. This, he claims, called for the assimilation of the Romanian majority with Hungarians in Transylvania and was accomplished primarily through the "Magyarization" of schools. Lehrer asserts that such programs were protested throughout history with petitions from "baffled" Romanians who did not understand this treatment, since they were in the majority and had inhabited the land longer than Hungarians, being descendants of ancient Dacians (vii).

Some Romanian history refers to the "Dacio-Roman" or "Daco-Romanian continuity theory" which traces the lineage of Romanians to the time of Roman occupation and claims Romanians are descendants of the Roman and Dacian peoples who intermarried. This supports their claim of inhabiting Transylvania prior to Hungarian settlement in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Illyés 2-3). According to a version of the history of Transylvania written by pro-Romanian historian Constantin Giurescu, "for centuries on end, moreover, this [Daco-Romanian continuity] was the opinion of all those who knew the Romanian people and studied their past." He continues: "the antiquity and continuity of the Romanian population in Transylvania were considered to be normal, logical and acknowledged without discussion" (34). Giurescu acknowledges that

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<sup>19</sup>David Martin, who specialized in foreign policy during the 20 years he worked for U.S. Senate, admits in his forward (v) to being "challenged" by the revision and subject matter since "[it was] clear that Lehrer was partisan of a Romanian Transylvania," but then states Lehrer's status (Europeanized American Jew born in NY) "...strengthened [the] claim to objectivity on the Transylvania issue" supposedly because Jews do not typically take sides in Romanian/Hungarian disputes and that his "strongly partisan attitude" is a justifiable product of "centuries-old conflict and oppression."



dissenters have tried to prove the first Romanians arrived in Transylvania only at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and were shepherds (35). This, in his opinion, could not be possible since Romanians have continually inhabited the region: “Transylvania has always been Romania’s ethnic reservoir, whence the superabundance of population in the mountainous regions ...overflowed in all directions....” (Giurescu 45).

However abundant the population may have been, the Romanians were limited by Hungarian rule, such as laws passed in the 1600s which specified that Orthodox Romanians were only “tolerated,”<sup>20</sup> and were “temporarily allowed to stay in the country, as long as this be agreeable to the princes and natives of the country” (Giurescu 51). Indeed, Romanians possessed few rights, not being one of the politically and socially privileged three Transylvanian nations who “sought to exclude Romanians from public life” (51). Romanians were further culturally isolated because of their religion: some religions were official with a “Four Religions Pact,” which excluded Orthodox; thus, the “religion of natives that had been Christianized many centuries before Hungarians was only tolerated” (Lehrer 37). It is argued by Romanian authors that although oppression under the Hungarian rules and the forced peasant lifestyle may have hindered their cultural growth, the Romanians nevertheless were the original inhabitants and had a right to Transylvania. Any emigration to Wallachia and Moldavia to seek opportunity, such as settlement in new villages with tax and labor exemptions at the beginning of 1635, is entirely understandable in the opinion of Romanian historians due to the harsh conditions and limitations they experienced under Hungarian rule (Giurescu 51).

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<sup>20</sup> The Romanians, but also Hungarians and Saxons not in the nobility or a “nation” (outside privileged class), were denoted as simply “tolerated” in 17<sup>th</sup> century laws (Illyés 41). The “tolerated” status is also cited by Lehrer (46).

### a. Treaty of Trianon

Romanians see the Treaty of Trianon as a carefully considered and justly executed territorial allocation that made Hungary more homogeneous and unified it from an ethnic and linguistic perspective.<sup>21</sup> According to Lehrer, the Hungarians under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy were “submerged in a mass of ethnic minorities” in contrast with the “improved” more consistent ethnic structure of postwar Hungary: “...while figures for non-Magyar population had decreased enormously, from 11,000,000 to 685,000, the figures for the Hungarian population proper had dropped by only a little more than 1,000,000” (168). The Hungarian request for a revision and their propaganda to seek support abroad distorted the truth in Lehrer’s opinion, and was the first disruption to the peace in postwar Europe “assailing basic principles which constituted European order after WWI” (171). Lehrer believes that the Treaty of Trianon simply reduced Hungary to its ethnic frontiers (Lehrer 192).

The treaty reunited all regions of Romania and this was seen as consistent with prior unions of Romania, many of which, according to Romanian historian Lucian Boia, are anachronistically imposed fabrications of nationalistic historiographers and communist regimes (129-132). Boia, a historian known for investigating myths of Romanian communism and nationalism, claims ideas of ethnic and political unity on national grounds would have been “foreign to the spirit of the [medieval] age” (129). Boia is in the minority: most of his peers support the idea of a union. Mircea Musat, a historian, describes how the unwillingly divided

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<sup>21</sup> Hungary became the most ethnically homogeneous state in the region next to Austria (Kovrig 25). Lehrer denies charges that Hungary was “mutilated” by the peace treaty, since what was taken was equal to what Hungarians had conquered over centuries by arbitrary methods and violence. The “injustice” Hungarians complained about because they had lost “71% territory and 63% population...only represented the ratification of the will of millions of non-Magyars....The Hungarians [he continues] themselves are the only ones to blame for the size of the sacrifice they accepted in 1920” (169).

Romanian feudal states<sup>22</sup> nevertheless possessed a sense of geographic unity, had economic, political, and military relations, and a unified sense of language, culture, faith and nationality that were “vital” in the preservation of their ancestral land and defense of their threatened unity throughout the Middle ages. “...Holding one hand on the plough and another on the sword, the Romanians managed to preserve their national and state entity throughout the mediaeval period” (Musat 118). In addition, historical figures are often credited with feats they may not have accomplished: Michael the Brave united Mutenia, Transylvania, and Moldavia under his “political scepter” in 1600 according to the Transylvanian writer Lupas<sup>23</sup> (Boia 136). Gabriel Bethlen’s military success and defense of Transylvanian rights in respect to the Hapsburg Empire are credited to the Romanians in Romanian historiography, ignoring that Bethlen, as “the prince of Transylvania was Hungarian, as was the entire ruling class of his land;” the Hungarians of Transylvania were not Romanian citizens in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as they are today (Boia 129). It is unlikely there was national consciousness or medieval unity, but myths of “organic development of the modern Romania”, i.e. the desire for the creation of the Romanian nation were appealed to during communism and used by Ceaușescu<sup>24</sup> to support Transylvania’s place in Romania. (Boia 136).

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<sup>22</sup> Romanians were subjected to “forced separation” into multiple Romanian lands- “owing to the process of feudal breaking up specific to all of Europe, as well as to the pressure of the great neighboring states which ...imposed the existence of artificial, fictitious frontiers drawn on the map of the same country...” (Musat 118).

<sup>23</sup> This supposed union of “Romanian lands” under Michael the Brave, who ascended the throne of Wallachia in 1593 and then led a “unified” uprising against the Ottomans, is also described by Musat (From Ancient Dacia to Modern Romania; published in 1985, during the communist era) under the heading “The union of the Romanian Lands, 1600: A momentous even in Romanian Mediaeval History” (147).

<sup>24</sup> “Highlighting these realities, the Romanian President [at the time] Nicolae Ceaușescu pointed out: “What always characterized the life and the struggles of the Romanians –throughout that long period- were the close, permanent connections among the voivodates on this territory, then between Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvanian and Dobruja. We must strongly assert that the preservation of these links and communities would hardly have been possible if there had been no close unity- in all respects- among all theses territories, among the population that had lived here for millenniums” (Musat 118).

## **b. Oppression**

Romanians and Hungarians have made alternating claims of oppression throughout history, or as Kovrig states: “Each ethnocultural entity perceives itself as a sometime victim of one or several others, and mirror image of victim and oppressor informs national ideology in many a dyad” (20). Lehrer contradicts Hungarian charges that the Romanian government persecuted its new Hungarian subjects after the Treaty of Trianon and argues that under Romanian rule the Hungarian peasants were “beneficiaries [of land reforms] to the same degree as Romanians” (intro. x). Most of the Hungarian oppression during communism cannot be denied or ignored, Ceaușescu’s regime was recognized for being repressive even by communist standards and was supported by nationalistic Romanians because of the harsh treatment of the Hungarian and other minorities (Mandelbaum 17). However, many Romanians viewed oppression of Hungarians as retribution for the centuries of Hungarian rule over a region that was stolen from its rightful people, citing various instances of “Magyarization” of Romanians in Transylvania,<sup>25</sup> and Hungary’s poor treatment of Romanians during the short revision of the Trianon borders during the 1940s.

## **c. The Romanians’ rightful land**

The Transylvania region is just as important to Romanians as Hungarians, Romanian historians argue, if not more so. At the end of his Transylvanian history, Giurescu lists why Transylvania is culturally important to Romanians—citing literary, scholarly, scientific achievements, such as that the first books in Romanian were printed in Transylvania in 1554 in Sibiu (104). Lehrer argues Hungarian inhabitation of Transylvania was “accidental”:

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<sup>25</sup> Hungary did attempted to “nationalize” is ethnic minorities particularly after 1867 : “a liberal nationalities law granted broad linguistic and cultural rights to non-Magyars, although the preamble underscored Hungary’s citizens formed an indivisible and unitary Hungarian nation...[the] later principle came to dominate the application of the law, and Magyarization became the operative policy.... subsequent laws limited minority rights” (Kovrig 21-22).

Transylvania was nothing but a land “over the mountains” to Hungarians and if they had been luckier in their expeditions to the west, the region would never have come under Hungarian rule (Lehrer 5). Further, he believes that this land has little meaning to them since “...with the mountains...[it was] neither a geographic nor historic fulfillment for the Hungarian people, preeminently a people of the plains...” (4). In contrast, for the Romanians—“Transylvania was the heart of ancient Dacia itself, pulsating with the same blood for thousands of years...what the Alföld<sup>26</sup> meant to the forefathers of today’s Hungarians, the land of Transylvania meant to the ancestors of today’s Romanians” (Lehrer 4).

## 2. Hungarian

According to Hungarian historians, there were few Romanians in Transylvania when the area was settled and developed by Hungarians in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (some sources claim 9<sup>th</sup> century) (Csenkey 45). Romanians then migrated from Wallachia and the southern Balkans, which was their original homeland, only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Kürti 44). Hungarians see Transylvania as an integral part of the ancient Kingdom of Hungary. When incorporated into other empires, Transylvania was the only part of the Hungarian kingdom that remained autonomous, leading to the national feeling that it is the only place the true Hungarian culture was preserved. The granting of Transylvania to the new Romanian Republic after WWI was a painful blow to Hungarians, since this particular territory held so much emotional and cultural significance and had historically been part of the medieval kingdom. Hungarians felt that despite the multi-ethnic nature of the territory, there were more Hungarians than other peoples and that minorities were consistently treated well under Hungarian rule. Romanian opponents refute this by citing the legacy of the medieval feudal system that had granted social and economic

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<sup>26</sup> Nagy Alföld- the “Great Hungarian Plain,” a similar region of cultural importance which is inspiration to and the homeland of many great Hungarian writers: “The 19th-century life of cowboys and their herds on the puszta [grazing areas of the plain] is commemorated in Hungarian folksongs, dances, and literature” (Hungary).

privileges to the three nations (Magyar, Székely, Saxons), but not Romanians. Hungarian historians counter that discrimination in feudalistic medieval Hungary was not so much an issue of ethnic, but class distinction since both Romanian and other peasants could rise up and assimilate in society.<sup>27</sup>

#### **a. Treaty of Trianon**

The Treaty of Trianon attempted to impart “justice” and “national fulfillment” to all peoples of the defeated empires, but was not necessarily successful. Both Mandlebaum and Kovrig argue “justice” and the national principle were not imparted to the losers of WWI, rather that Wilsonian principles of national self-determination were “applied exclusively to the benefit of nations represented by successor states... 1.7 million persons of Magyar mother tongue found themselves in Romania” (Kovrig 25). The “truncated Hungary” had a population of 8 million while “successor states encompassed large Magyar and other minorities, whose basic rights were bound [protected only] by minority treaties” (25). Germany and Hungary were punished with confiscation of territory to “weaken them in view of what they may attempt in the future” and as retribution. Their new borders disregarded the ethnicity, language, and culture of the inhabitants especially in “demographically easy” Germany where homogeneous “German populations contiguous to the post-1919...Weimar Republic that wished to be part of that state were nonetheless assigned to other countries, notably Poland,” but also with Hungarian communities that were “kept out of new Hungarian state even when they were contiguous to it” (Appendix E) (Mandelbaum 11).

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<sup>27</sup> Supported by Illyés: “suppression was social not national.... Romanians had opportunity to enter nobility...[and] looked upon it as the best way to rise socially” (41). Also Kovrig: “on the eve of 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman conquest, the greatest part of [Transylvanian] population was Magyar by descent or natural assimilation...[the] status of non-Magyars depended more on social rank than on ethnic origin” (22).

## b. Oppression

Hungarians did not fare well in the new Romanian republic as “the Romanian constitution declared it to be a unitary national state and ruled out collective recognition of minorities” and explicitly sought to Romanianize Transylvania. This program was “more sociopolitical than cultural” but nevertheless had detrimental cultural consequences for Hungarians as their language was “expunged” from official life and place names were Romanianized (Kovrig 33). In addition, the Hungarian minority was discriminated against and “subjected to a reign of terror at the hand of vengeful Romanians who had encouragement of the government in Bucharest” when the Vienna Diktat was retracted in 1944 and the territory was returned to Romania (Kovrig 41). During this time over 100,000 Magyars left Transylvania, some under pressure from retreating German and Hungarian forces as well as from the Romanians. In Romania, Hungarians were also discriminated against when it came to economic reforms and the redistribution of land (Kovrig 41).

Ceaușescu’s extreme nationalistic regime was hard on Hungarian minorities, a population that was erased through irregularities in census taking and decreased through emigration.<sup>28</sup> “Respect for Magyar minority educational and cultural rights was greater in the early ‘50s at the height of Stalinism than later when Romanian nationalism was the key legitimizing tool of the Ceaușescu dictatorship” according to Kovrig (42). Even after the revolution and the end of Ceaușescu’s regime, the “demonization of the minorities left its mark on Romanian consciousness” (Kovrig 63). Even today a “pervasive mistrust and dislike of Magyars” informs Romanian political life (Kovrig 67).

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<sup>28</sup> Bucharest also accepted “per capita ransom” from West Germany and Israel for its German and Jewish minorities with the goal of “purifying” Romania (Kovrig 50).

### c. The Hungarian borderland

The new minority status of Hungarians in Transylvania after WWI discouraged Hungarian intellectuals and citizens who regarded Transylvania not as an “empty historical space, but a cradle of Hungarian civilization” marking the “ancestral terrain” and encircling the historic national space (Kürti 15). Though Transylvania is distant from central Hungary<sup>29</sup> and has not been a political part of the country since 1920,<sup>30</sup> it continues to be included within the borders in a cultural and nationalistic sense because “real borders are not the current state borders, but the farthest reaches of the physical and imaginary Transylvania” (Kürti 15). The border has changed so frequently and the ownership is so debated that Transylvania is often defined by the transitions it has endured: “borderland is the frame of reference within which Transylvania has received its qualities as a quintessential, remote area in nationalist cartography” (Kürti 16). The concept of the Hungarian nation in the minds of contemporary Hungarian intellectuals and politicians, even when they discuss EU ascension, includes Hungarians living in Transylvania (in Romania) and thus the borders of the Hungarian nation in their minds are not those of the current country (Kürti 16).

### D. Development of national consciousness

The most common principles used to validate claims to Transylvania are time and power: Who was there first? Who controlled the region the longest? Many of the ethnicities in the diverse region, including the Saxons,<sup>31</sup> have tried to justify claims of original habitation of

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<sup>29</sup> According to Kürti the presence of a distant regions as the birthplace or “cauldron of national culture” is common among national elites in the “myth makings” of East-Central European nations (he cites the Slovak Highland Tatra Mountain shepherd as an example) (15).

<sup>30</sup> The brief Hungarian rule (40-44) resulting from the Vienna diktat is viewed as liberation from two decades of Romanian state oppression (Kürti 71).

<sup>31</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century Transylvanian German Lorenz Toeppelt affirmed Roman origin of Romanians but falsified an important source to suit his own views, perhaps to prove the Dacian origin of Transylvanian Germans. This reflected the attempts of most European people (and scholars) of that time to demonstrate their antiquity (Illyés 35).



Transylvania by relating themselves to a variety of often questionable ancient peoples.

Additionally, national myth or myths that rest on little archeological or scholarly evidence are frequently used to support these claims. Notably, this was the trend during the 19<sup>th</sup> century national awakenings in Europe but also in the Middle Ages when ethnicities also sought to ennoble themselves with the perpetuation of “archaic myths of national origin” and by relation to “ancient predecessors”: the Trojan-French and Hun-Hungarian continuities are two examples (Csenkey 45).

The Enlightenment changed how history was interpreted. The “nation,” “chronological primacy,” and “historical rights” became the foci of the historical inquiry and the idea grew that the concept of a nation could only be defined by its history (Illyés 53-4). Thus, nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe encouraged the identification of homelands, ancient ancestors, and the cultural self-definition of peoples with a common language or heritage. Medieval myths were revised to support national continuity and identity and used to justify national rights and independence (Illyés 54). While most Western European nations were established earlier and relatively more easily as political units, due to linguistic and national unity, there was more need for a convincing nationalistic ideology in the diverse central and Eastern Europe to create national states. The fact that the later a nation was established, the greater the emphasis on history, is evident in the eastern European nations which continue to rely heavily on “historical mythology” and still have cultural and ethnic conflicts<sup>32</sup> (Illyés 54). The development of national consciousness and the territorial aspect of modern nations influenced, to a large extent, the claims Hungarian and Romania made about Transylvania.

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<sup>32</sup> Also noted by Kovrig: “All nation-states nurture founding myths and adapt them to changing circumstances, but such myths—which are marked more by ethnocentric bias than by outright fantasy—have played exceptionally prominent part in belated process of nation building in Central and Eastern Europe” (20).

## 1. Romania

The nature of the Romanian national movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had much to do with the lack of a formation of a Romanian intelligentsia dating back to medieval Hungarian rule, as Romanians were not one of the three prestigious “nations” with social and political status. When Romanians did achieve social status, it was through assimilation: they converted to Catholicism or Protestantism and “merged into Hungarian nobility” resulting in the lack of a Romanian noble or intellectual class in Transylvania (Illyés 42). Since there was no intellectual class, the “chief cultural institution was the Orthodox Church” and any intellectuals there were priests, or sons of priests, who received their education in monasteries and/or from their fathers. Outside of Brasov, there were no permanent Romanian schools until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The Transylvania Romanians made their first political move that would lead to a “distinctly Romanian cultural life” when a faction of the Orthodox Church entered a union with Rome in 1697-8 (Illyés 43-44). The Hapsburg Empire was hindered in their extension of power over Transylvania by the powerful rights of the “three nations,” and the nation’s churches hindered the spread of Catholicism in Transylvania. Roman Catholicism, the religion of the Hapsburgs, was the religion they wanted their subjects to follow as a means of strengthening their own power over the Catholic Church (Illyés 42). Partnering with the Romanians, who were 40% of the Transylvanian population at the end of the century, not only helped the Hapsburgs increase their power but also improved the social and political situation for Romanians because they did not have to abandon the sole source of support for their national unity, their Orthodox Faith, in the agreement (Illyés 43).

In general, Transylvania Romanians benefited from Hapsburg schemes to weaken the Hungarian nobility and to “create an enlightened and centralized authoritarian state” with the

support of non-noble groups (Illyés 44). The Hapsburgs gave more Romanians more access to education with the creation of more schools and also allowed them to study at Hungarian universities, "...where they learned Latin and accessed the Latin Humanistic writings about the Latin origin of their own language" (Illyés 44). This increased national consciousness and would lead to theories of Daco-Roman ancestry and a sense of a right to Transylvania (44). Romanian intellectuals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century "Transylvanian School" were provided with a political argument to support their equality with the other political "nations" of Transylvania who had long denied them rights on the basis that Romanian people did not constitute a "nation" from a legal standpoint (Illyés 50). The ideas of the "Transylvanian School" and Latinist movement, which renewed interest in Latin literacy and rediscovery of Latin texts, also supported unity with ethnic Romanians in other principalities. This was based on the commonality of their language of Roman origin and theory of continuity with ancient Dacia (Illyés 51). This 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of unification formed the basis of modern Romanian consciousness and substantiated the Romanians' belief in their rights to the territories awarded following WWI (Illyés 56).

After unification, however, Romanian nationalism became increasingly extreme. While at first the "fulfillment of national goals" affected the movement positively and historians began to write more objectively and acknowledge foreign influences, an intolerant attitude to non-Romanians soon surfaced, particularly in the middle class and among intellectuals (Illyés 58). Following WWII and the prevalence of Marxist ideology, nationalism and excessive patriotism gained support in the era of "de-Russification" that followed the withdrawal of the Soviets from Romania in 1958 (Illyés 60). During Ceaușescu's regime, nationalist ideology was further emphasized, as were the nation building myths of the prewar period. History was rewritten to focus on the "organic" national unity throughout Romania's past (such as claims of Medieval

unity) (Kovrig 49). “The Magyars were depicted as historical interlopers in the process of Daco-Roman continuity, as the fundamentally alien oppressors of Romanian Transylvania in the past and as an inassimilable, crypto-revisionist threat to the integrity and cohesion of contemporary Romania” (Kovrig 49). In addition, much of this historical writing focused on Transylvania to support Romania’s claims to the region and its rightful unification with “the old kingdom.” In a speech made to historians, Ceaușescu personally demanded that Daco-Roman origins and continuity in Transylvania be the “fundamental premise of all ideological, theoretical, and political-education activities” (Illyés 64).

## **2. Hungary**

The legacy of the Hungarian Kingdom and centuries of independence maintained by Hungarians in Transylvania provided Hungarians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with what they believed were more legitimate reasons for why Transylvania should be part of Hungary, not Romania. The formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867 led to a renewed national identity with independence in internal affairs. The language reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century made the Magyar language more suited to literature and this supported national consciousness among a more unified Hungarian intelligentsia. Previously, the elite in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would speak German or French. In developing a national identity, Hungarians were influenced by both their historical connection to Europe as the human bulwark that prevented Muslim expansion into the Christian West and by Eastern roots and myths believed to connect them in a lineage with the Huns, although modern scholars reject this origin (Csenkey 14).

In addition, Hungarian national consciousness can be viewed as expanding from two “roots” —1) historical narrative, focusing on heroics like Stephen I (1000-1038), the patron saint and founder of Hungary and 2) the emphasis of a national portraiture and Hungarian national

traits as found in folk art and the agrarian Hungarian peasant lifestyle (Csenkey 45). For Hungarians, the peasant lifestyle was thought to preserve the essence of what it meant to be Hungarian. The peasant for them is the “ancient guardian of the true national character,” a character unaltered by history and one impervious to change and development in other sectors of the modern nation (Csenkey 45).

### III. The Csángó

*The group known in Moldavia and Gyimes as “Csángós” is itself a contested community, for both nations claim it as their own. (Kurti 112)*

With an understanding of the conflict and ambiguity surrounding the borders and history of Transylvania, an equally ambiguous and controversial theme discovered during our field study, i.e. the ethnic identity of the Csángó, will now be addressed. “Delimitation of ethnic entities is especially problematic in all parts of the world which are continuously inhabited but not divided into either sharp ecological zones or strong and durable states” (Moerman 1215). It is clear the contested and historically complex Transylvania cannot be described as an area encompassed by a series of fixed borders. It is host to many ethnicities and minorities, the result of old and new diasporas, and many claim it as their ancestral homeland. The minority in question, the Csángó, are an especially enigmatic and unique ethnic group in Transylvania. In Ghimeș-Făget, villagers described, referenced, or identified a Csángó presence.<sup>33</sup> In a larger context, Csángó represent a Roman Catholic enclave in areas of present day Romania in either Moldavia or Transylvania. The Csángó are considered to be bilingual, speaking Romanian and a non-standard form of Hungarian.

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<sup>33</sup> Many villagers mentioned or provided a definition of the Csángó. Of the individuals interviewed, 15 out of 30 identified themselves as Csángó or acknowledged some link to the group (see Appendix J).

The majority of documentation and literature on the Csángó primarily describes the Moldavian Csángó, probably because this is the most well known group and the region where Csángó representation has historically been found. Scholars are divided on whether other groups, such as the group in Ghimeș-Făget, should be called Csángó. This is not a unique issue, according to Moerman: “In reading about various areas of the world one frequently encounters ethnic names with unclear referents and groups of people with no constant label... [there is] lack of agreement about the criteria which define the entities—variously called “tribes,” “cultures,” “societies,” “peoples”—which we describe” (1215).

While the presence of Csángó in Ghimeș-Făget can be debated and only further research could potentially lead to a consensus, for the purpose of this paper the group shall be called Csángó. This conclusion is supported by our field study findings. People and labels are fluid, and if individuals in Ghimeș-Făget identify as Csángó, we should consider them as such: “It is widely recognized that the labels by which people identify themselves and are identified by others are important and convenient signs of ethnic membership” (Evans-Pritchard in Moerman 1219). Whatever the locale or context, it is agreed that the Csángó are unusual and have historically been considered distinct from Romanian and Hungarian populations in Romania.

### **A. The historical Csángó**

The majority of literature<sup>34</sup> consulted for this thesis agrees that the Csángó population in Moldavia consists of medieval immigrants who came from Hungary, and the majority of researchers (both Hungarian and Romanian, according to Baker) believe them to be of Hungarian origin<sup>35</sup> (664). The etymology of the term Csángó has also been debated. There are multiple

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<sup>34</sup> Only English language literature and a few translations, not direct Romanian or Hungarian language sources, were used here.

<sup>35</sup> For Baker the issue of interest is not if they were Hungarian or Romanian, but whether the Hungarians immigrating to Moldavia were originally of Magyar or Székler “stock” (664). He concludes they are of Magyar

theories, each often employed to justify different theories of Csángó origin and thus lay claim to them: “In many considerations of the origin of this people the derivation of their name is held up as crucial evidence. Unfortunately it is no less contentious a question than that of their origin and, in my view, is of little help in resolving it”<sup>36</sup> (Baker 659). One of the most common theories of origin, which we heard in Ghimeș-Făget, suggests Csángó derives from the verb *csang/csáng* (i.e. to wander, stroll, ramble, rove) and thus the name of this ethnic group refers to the migratory, colonizing character of the Csángó (Vilmos 117). Linguist Klára Sándor claims the Hungarians in Transylvania used the name to refer to one group of Moldavian Hungarians, and the term later came to denote all Hungarian speakers in Moldavia (318).

The Csángó were initially mentioned in missionary reports from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These reports constitute the primary source of information for much research on this group and continue to serve as source material today (Kálmán 12). Prior to the publication of linguistic records in 1880, historical research portrayed the Csángó as descendants of Cumanians, who were assumed to speak Hungarian until it was proven ancient Cumanians spoke Turkish (Kálmán 10). It is generally agreed the Moldavian Csángó were distinct from the majority population in the area at the time of documentation (16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) because of their non-Moldavian Romanian dialect, material culture, religion, and Hungarian language use. Based on these distinctions as well as “intellectual and material ethnography” Lükő Gábor, a Hungarian researcher, ethnologist, and folklorist, was the first of many to further divide the Moldavian Csángó into two groups in the 1930s, which are separated geographically, as are most sub-groupings within the designation “Csángó” (Kálmán 12). The first group was defined as being in

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origin, but believes the Ghimeș-Făget Csángó to be Székler. Thus, Baker considers the group in Ghimeș-Făget not technically Csángó (667-8). See Baker’s “On the Origin of the Moldavian Csángós,” which also covers more of the Romanian perspectives and claims over the Csángó, aside from Romanian nationalist Mărtinaș.

<sup>36</sup> Example: The “linguistic evidence” verifying the Romanian origin of the Csángó though the derivation of the term Csángó used by Mărtinaș (50,63).

the north at the mouth of River Moldavia and further south around Bacău; “members of this group identify as Hungarian and approve of the term Csángó.” The second group, along Szeret/Siret and Tatros/Trotuş Rivers, identified as Székely (related to Transylvanian Székely) and “did not approve of being called Csángó” (Kálmán 12). After the Second World War, there was little research done on the Csángó for a period of over 30 years, then more linguistic and ethnographic studies were carried out, as opposed to historical research (Kálmán 13). In general, there is more historic documentation and personal accounts of the Csángó than ethnographic research, which may account for some of the confusion surrounding the group.

Problematically, just when interest in the Csángó resumed, socialist regimes and nationalistic propaganda influenced research and historical interpretation of this already enigmatic ethnicity. One theory, a product of Ceauşescu’s 1980s Romania, claimed that the Moldavian Csángó are Romanians, not Hungarians, who converted to Roman Catholicism due to Magyarization throughout the centuries. This theory was favored by Romanian nationalist and politicians because it supported the idea of the “victimized” Romanian, oppressed for centuries under Hungarian rule, and because it legitimized Romania’s territorial claims to Transylvania. In addition, if the Csángó were ethnic Romanians who endured cultural, religious, and linguistic assimilation by Hungarians, then they were members of the Romanian majority, and the Ceauşescu regime was doing them a favor by returning them to their true Romanian roots.<sup>37</sup> This view, according to Kálmán, was “scientifically sanctioned in 1985 and became the only acceptable official view within Romanian scientific circles” (14).

Romanian partisan Dumitru Mărtinaş expanded on this theory in The Origin of the Changos,<sup>38</sup> explaining that the Csángó emigrated from Transylvania to Moldavia due to

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<sup>37</sup> Currently, this line of reasoning is used to justify the denial of minority rights to the Csángó (Sándor 327).

<sup>38</sup> Changos: alternate anglicized spelling for Csángó



economic and social circumstances they encountered during harsh Medieval Hungarian subjugation. When they arrived in Moldavia, native Moldavians assumed they were Hungarians because of their Roman Catholic religion, bilingualism, and strange dialect (Mărtinaş 28). This belief persisted, according to Mărtinaş, because until his publication, all scholarly research focused on the Hungarian dialect of the Csángó and avoided the study of the Romanian dialect among these people (Mărtinaş 12). The public were “misinformed” by the work of Magyar scholars and there was no critical analysis of the “poor linguistic evidence” on which their conclusions were based (Mărtinaş 22). The Csángó could not have been Hungarians who were assimilated once reaching Moldavia, Mărtinaş claims, because they spoke a Transylvanian Romanian dialect and wore the traditional peasant clothing of Transylvania Romanians (40).

This theory parallels the “union politics of the Vatican” and the Vatican’s attempt to reunify the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches following the theory that all Romanians were once Roman Catholics who had taken their faith from the Roman Empire. However, only the Romanians “Hungarianized” by the Roman Catholic Hungarian kings in Moldavia, the Csángó, kept the ancient Catholic faith. In the opinion of the Church, just as the Csángó have experienced a “return to the ancient language” (assimilation, they now speak Romanian), “so should the Orthodox Romanians return to the Catholic Church” (Sándor 327). While the Romanian state and the Church share the idea that Csángó were once Romanian, it is unlikely any Romanian government would support the idea of Romanians converting to Roman Catholicism.

### **1. Relationship with Hungary**

Most contemporary researchers support the Hungarian origin of the Csángó, and there is substantial literature on the Csángó’s relationship to Hungary. Whatever their origins, the Csángó were differentiated from Orthodox Romanians and united by their religion. Their

relationship with Hungary, maintenance of the Roman Catholic Church in Moldavia, and communication with Rome are cited as factors that initially helped preserve this community's identity. In the middle ages, the Csángó community in Moldavia was able to maintain connections, though limited according to Sándor, with Hungary and Transylvania (then part of the Hungarian Kingdom) through commercial links (Gábor 56; Vilmos 139). From the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the 17<sup>th</sup>, the primary connection with Hungary was through the church: "With the fall of the independent Hungarian state, the strong connection of Moldavian Catholic Csángó to the Hungarian Kingdom disintegrated, leaving the few missionaries to arrive from Hungary the only connection to Hungary under Hapsburg rule" (Gábor 56). This connection dissolved in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>39</sup> isolating the Csángó settlements in Moldavia almost completely from Hungarians in Transylvania, and by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, greater Hungary as well.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism, social development, and the development of the Hungarian state had little impact on the Csángó. They were equally isolated from the Romanian society and its development by lifestyle and from one another by the geography and distance between villages. In Moldavia, the Csángó persisted in their traditional agrarian lifestyle, Roman Catholic religion, and language that continued to distinguish them from their Orthodox Romanian neighbors (Kálmán 31). The isolation from advances in modern society preserved a peasant culture of subsistence economy that has persisted mostly unchanged until recently<sup>40</sup> (Sándor

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<sup>39</sup> Separation of the Csángó from the Hungarian Catholic church: Until end of 16<sup>th</sup> century there were two Hungarian episcopates in Moldavia, but their function was gradually taken over by a new episcopate in Bacau (Sándor 321). The episcopate of Bacau went from Hungarian to Polish jurisdiction and as the Polish Bishop was not in Moldavia to supervise the disinterested and corrupt local priests, the needs of the Csángó were not met. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rome assumed direct control over Catholic activities in Moldavia (Sándor 319).

<sup>40</sup> Sándor writes there currently is not even a handicraft industry among the Moldavian Csángó (319). While we did not find the mass marketing of handicrafts in Ghimeș-Făget, weavings and traditional clothing were being collected and preserved by a woman who had started a small "Ethnographic" Museum in the village. It was one of the few tourist attractions. She and the weaver we interviewed were 2 of the estimated 5 to 6 old women, according to the

319). Under these conditions, a Csángó intelligentsia did not develop and their “archaic rural culture” was preserved. Traditional folk art and expressive culture, as a result, remained commonplace aspects of daily life and did not assume the status of “ancient relics” for the Csángó (Sándor 319). These issues will be elaborated in Section IV.

Kálmán asserts the Csángó defined themselves as “Catholics,” and not Hungarian, though “they were always conscious of their Hungarian identity and persisted in it” (31). It is not clear whether the Csángó consciously acknowledged a Hungarian identity or equated any sense of identity to the language they spoke. Further, the conceptualization of Hungary as a nation state was a new development in which the Csángó did not participate. While Hungarians in Hungary or Romanians in Romania had begun to identify with the increasingly distinct “nation” as we think of it today, the isolated Csángó continued to depend on the Roman Catholic Church for guidance,<sup>41</sup> using religion as a primary means of identification. This did not prevent the Hungarian intelligentsia from defining the Csángó as ethnically and nationally Hungarian, though the Csángó themselves do not, it seems, see themselves as a Hungarian national minority (Kapalo 18, 29).

## **2. Relationship with the Church**

In Klára Sándor’s, “Contempt for Linguistic Human Rights in the Service of the Catholic Church: The Case of the Csángó,” Sándor argues that despite their strong religiosity and trust in the Church, it shares responsibility with secular Hungary for the abandonment of the Csángó, their assimilation, and the denial of their linguistic human rights (Sándor 318). As

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museum director, in the village who still made traditional clothes and weavings. The Museum director regretted that none of the young girls in the village do weaving and crafts, and that so few of the old women continue these traditions (Field Notes. May 26, 2008. Spotts. 17). The weaver said that she and her husband used to hand make all their clothes and products, but do not anymore since they can buy some of the things now. The weaver makes traditional rugs and blankets mostly for her family, but also sometimes for sale upon request. She sells much of what she makes in Hungary or to tourists visiting Ghimeș-Făget (Field Notes. May 30, 2008. Spotts. 25-26).

<sup>41</sup> “...morality has very strong and natural influence on all aspects of existence; it is normally the priests who have almost exclusive social control in the Csángó communities” (Kotics 1997, 49-50 in Sándor 320).

communications with Hungary ceased and Hungary continued to progress in its national development, the Csángó were left behind. The Roman Catholic Church became the main means of social cohesion: "...since Hungarians of Moldavia had neither a state, nor an intelligentsia of their own...they expected guidance with regard to matters of life and the world from the Church, the priests" (Kálmán 31). Attending mass and confession were both acts of religion and a means of distinguishing themselves from the "surrounding Orthodox world" (31). The Church and the Roman Catholic religion provided the overarching structure that enabled the Csángó to maintain their culture, language, and, according to Kálmán, Hungarian identity. Once the Roman Catholic Church in Moldavia weakened, this ethnic community began to dissolve and the Csángó were more easily assimilated, a process that was "felt unconsciously" by the Csángó (Kálmán 32).

The disintegration of the Roman Catholic Church in Moldavia occurred because of the lack of support from Rome. In the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries there were almost no Roman Catholic priests left in Moldavia, let alone Hungarian-speaking priests. This is the result of the Catholic Church sending temporary foreign missionaries of every type except Hungarian missionaries, who could effectively minister to the people in Moldavia unlike their foreign counterparts. This continued despite requests of the Csángó in Moldavia for Hungarian priests. The Csángó sent letters to popes and the Hungarian head of the church over the centuries: "Historical sources show that since the sixteenth century Catholic priests in Moldavia have not served religion exclusively, and that the Csángó have repeatedly asked Rome for priests who could speak their mother tongue" (Sándor 318). Hungary sometimes supported their efforts, but Italian missionaries, in defense of their positions/livelihoods, and Austrian policy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which argued that "sending Hungarian missionaries to preach to subjects who had fled to another country would be supporting illegal migration," worked against the Csángó (Gábor 54).

Subversively, 18<sup>th</sup> century Austrian counsels also reinterpreted Csángó complaints or sent false information to Rome, i.e., that Moldavian Roman Catholics did not require Hungarian priests and that the priests already there spoke the language of the country (meaning Romanian, which Italians could more easily learn due to the languages similarities). This was despite Vatican orders that church services should be in the “mother tongue” of the congregation (Sándor 323).

The missionaries that were sent, in conjunction with the few Hungarian monks of another Franciscan order, led to a presence in Moldavia of more than 4 different organizations of the Church (Sándor 322). The literature indicates Polish priests, Italian Jesuits, Italian monks of the Franciscan order, Bosnian missionaries, and Croatians were sent to Moldavia (Gábor 33; Sándor 322). According to Sándor, the liturgy was still held in Latin, to which the congregation could not respond during the service, and the people could not communicate with the priests in general (322). Because of this disconnect between the priests and the Roman Catholic Csángó, “no substantial congregational life could evolve” (Kálmán 33). Another issue was the conduct of the foreign priests, most notably Italians who were often sent on three-year missions to Moldavia starting in 1622. These priests were encouraged to go to Moldavia with the promise of promotion and many of the Italian Jesuits “stole ecclesiastical objects [and] lived with women” (Sándor 322).

As Hungarians in Moldavia were increasingly “left to themselves” through this lack of effective support from the Church, reports of 18th century priests and missionaries began to note the growth of “popular religiosity” or folk religion (Kálmán 37). This became the foundation of Csángó religious life and it both persisted and evolved as a result of “deáks,” church clerks who spoke Hungarian, assuming more responsibility. Normally these clerks would be just assistants to the priests, but as time went on they performed increasingly more ecclesiastical duties,

including officiating at weddings, funerals, and baptisms, and directing singing in church (Kálmán 36; Sándor 322). Foreign missionaries to Moldavia “complained about their [the clerks’] ignorance in ecclesiastical matters” but the “deáks” helped sustain these congregations more than the priests because they spoke the same language as their parishioners (36). The missionaries resented what they saw as the undermining of their authority. They also believed the clerks did not respect the sacraments and saw the people as uneducated and superstitious, though the missionaries could not resolve these issues themselves (Kálmán 37).

With the “new world” to proselytize, the Vatican turned their attention west and efforts in Moldavia decreased even more: “as far as the attitude of Rome is concerned, a new era began with the 18<sup>th</sup> century” (Kálmán 38). Further, The Vatican’s hope of reuniting the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church, starting with Moldavia, was gradually realized as unrealistic and abandoned (Kálmán 38). By the 18th century, the Jesuits had left Moldavia completely and the Franciscans came to the region only occasionally after this time (38).

## **B. Assimilation**

The lack of connections with the modern Hungarian nation and the Roman Catholic Church’s abandonment of the Csángó led to their gradual assimilation. Charges are also made that the Csángó were victims of deliberate programs of assimilation. Accusations like these became more frequent as the Csángó culture and communities were discovered by newly nationalistic Hungarians. The “national awakening” in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century led the Hungarian public to become more aware of the existence of Hungarians “living beyond the Carpathian Mountains” and to recognize how much they had already become assimilated (Gábor 56). Budapest authorities, especially the “liberal political elite”, proposed to take action by the 1870s and '80s, but these plans regarded the Csángó as Hungarian citizens, like Bukovinians and

Székley who had migrated in the 1880s. Because, the Csángó had migrated earlier and were Romanian citizens, not much came of this posturing (Gábor 57). While the Treaty of Trianon was resented by Hungarian nationalists, it was the only positive political act of the time for the Csángó because it removed a national border that had isolated them from Transylvanian Hungarians. For example, it made it easier for the Moldavian Csángó to travel to Pentecost Pilgrimages and other events (Gábor 58). However, Romanian officials did not approve of the contact between the Csángó in Moldavia and other Hungarian-speaking Transylvanians and they tried to prevent travel between their settlements as well as limiting visits to them by ethnographers and tourists (58).

That the extreme nationalism of the Ceașescu regime left few ethnic minorities in Romania unscathed is evident—as Gábor phrases it: “the “virtual disappearance” of Csángó-Hungarians is proportionate to the growth of the brutality of the Romanian communist regime” (70). Intimidation during census-taking and manipulation of statistics, the “tools of battle” for Romanian nationalism, contributed to the “statistical disappearance” of the Csángó during national communism (Gábor 70). Individuals were harassed if they declared themselves as Hungarians and census-takers were instructed not to count individuals as Hungarian (Gábor 74). Csángó were told to identify themselves as Romanian since they were Roman Catholic (74). Sándor cites an instance where religious leaders the Csángó trusted told them to identify themselves as Romanian: “before the 1992 census in Romania, a bishop’s letter ordered priests to instruct flock as to what nationality to declare” (327). No effort was made to clear up potential linguistic confusion between two conveniently similar-sounding Romanian words: “român=Romanian and romano=Roman” (Sándor 327). Authors like Mărtinaș not only strengthened the nationalism of the majority and fulfilled the desire for a pure historical Romania

by portraying Csángó as victims of Hungarian oppression and Magyarization, but also served to manipulate the knowledge of the Csángó themselves, many who only spoke Romanian and had no strong internal history, let alone access to other theories of their origin.

There are also reports of prior attempts to assimilate the Moldavian Csángó population. With the emergence of the Romanian nation state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, strong national feelings developed and the Csángó were targeted by the state's "overt assimilation policy" (Sándor 323). A policy was enacted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that prohibited masses in Hungarian—the first recorded instance was an 1895 law that forbid bilingual catechism (Gábor 54; Sándor 323). Priests and cantors were not to use Hungarian,<sup>42</sup> but many cantors continued anyway until the 1930s when prohibition of Hungarian became official with bishop's orders affecting liturgies and services.<sup>43</sup> In addition, traditional prayers were translated to Romanian and a school for cantor/deacons was founded in which prospective young cantors were taken away from the community and trained in Romanian. Cantors who did not comply and continued to speak Hungarian or exhibited Hungarian sympathies were punished by priests and secular officials or dismissed (Gábor 59; Sándor 323).

Actions such as these hindered the "popular religiosity" that had developed in response to the disconnect between priests and the congregation and further undermined the cultural foundations of the Csángó who depended on the "deáks" or Cantors to minister to their religious needs. Because religion served as the foundation of the Csángó community life, erecting linguistic borders and barriers in their churches was a very effective assimilation tactic.

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<sup>42</sup> Sándor used "Csángó" and "Csángó tongue" instead of Hungarian (323).

<sup>43</sup> Gábor also notes an order prior to WWII in Bacau County that all masses in Catholic churches were to be conducted in Romanian, and further specified that priests and cantors could only lead hymns in Romanian or Latin and that they would be punished if they did otherwise (Gábor 58).



Perhaps even more disturbing is the use of science in interwar Romania to justify ethnic discrimination and assimilation. “The development of a scientific worldview of race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed greatly to the emergence of a new conceptualization of the nation—one seen in biological terms” (Turda 361). For nationalists in both Hungary and Romania, this provided a more legitimate means to separate Hungarians or Romanians from other minorities. Anthropologists could formulate a “racial type” for their nation through cranial characteristics and serology, the science of serums—in this case blood serum—as the framework (Turda 364). Many researchers of the 1930s and 1940s believed blood best demonstrated racial boundaries, including the Romanian eugenicist and racial anthropologist Petru Râmneant: “blood is the real, perhaps the unique, source which remained untouched by the vicissitudes of time” (Râmneant in Turda 370). Racial typing was soon applied not just to define “national character” but as a solution for long-standing border disputes: “Serology, it was hoped by both Hungarian and Romanian anthropologists, should help clarify the debate over multiethnic territories, especially Transylvania” (Turda 370). Râmneant applied serological theories to determine the racial origin of the ethnic groups of Transylvania (Romanians, Hungarians, Széklers, and Csángó) in a series of articles and books published in the '30s and '40s. Not surprisingly, the nationalistic Râmneant found the Széklers to be Magyarized Romanians and determined that the Csángó were racially Romanians (Turda 370). This “evidence” supported Romanian’s claim to Transylvania, justified their attempts to create a more culturally homogenous nation, and “scientifically” proved Romanian ethnic homogeneity.

## C. Controversial issues

The literature on the Csángó ethnicity is challenging in that there is very little ethnographic work on the population and much conflicting historical literature. Additionally, there is no discussion of the historiography or the reliability of the existing literature.

### 1. Origin

A pervasive theme in the literature and the focus of the majority of research is whether the Csángó should be considered Romanian or Hungarian. Thus, the majority of the literature on the Csángó is on the question of origin. Mărtinaş and other Ceaşescu era Romanian scholars argued the Csángó were Magyarized Romanians. The theory that Csángó are of Romanian ancestry and were converted to Catholicism and assimilated by the Hungarians has been used by both the Catholic Church and the Romanian government to deny the Csángó ethnic minority status and rights. This is despite the fact that, “both Hungarian and international scholars unanimously agree that the Moldavian Catholic population, called Csángó...is Hungarian by origin” (Vilmos 117). The general consensus of scholars is that the Csángó came from the West, not the East, and settled in Moldavia in the Middle Ages (Vilmos 118). Unlike his fellow scholars, Kapalo acknowledges both possibilities: “The Moldvian Csángós, however, defy classification as either Romanian or Hungarian, and yet they display undeniable cultural affinities with both groups” (1). Kürti calls the Hungarian claim to the Csángó “equally spurious as well as dubious”:

All historical, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence to the contrary, Hungarian intellectuals continue to see the Csángós as distinctly but fundamentally Hungarian. In fact, they view the Csángós as a minority within a minority, and this in itself is an interesting nationalistic contradiction. While on the one hand

Hungarian intellectuals believe that the Csángó diaspora is different in many ways from the surrounding populations, this difference actually reinforces their attachment to the Hungarian nation on the other hand. (112)

In the Hungarian opinion there are groups of Csángó in Moldavia, Ghimeș, and around Brasov. The fact that the groups' ethnic identity is based more on religion than on the Magyar language or the history of population shifts in Transylvania is acknowledged in these arguments, but is not considered to negate or diminish what Hungarians perceive as the Csángó's inherent Hungarianness. The problem of their "otherness" and whatever links the Csángó may have to Romania are invalidated by the theory that the Csángó are actually a separated group of Széklers (thus verifying their Hungarian origin) who migrated eastward hundreds of years ago. Scholars reason their longer separation and greater distance from Hungary explains their individuality and unique culture, distinct from, and considered more archaic than, that of Széklers (Kürti 112). "In Hungarian nationalist mythmaking, the Transylvanian Hungarian population received their temporary and spatial location within the national culture. If the Széklers are "remote," the Csángós are even more distant" (Kürti 112).

## **2. Demography**

A second controversial issue is how many Csángó truly exist and existed in the past. Numerical underrepresentation in demographic data is a known problem in Eastern Europe, and most Csángó numbers are theoretical. Intentional census discrepancies and the nature of the Csángó self-definition further distort population statistics. To cite just one example:

In the 1992 census of the Romanian Population, 2,165 people declared themselves 'Csángós'. However, this in no way reflects the number of people who refer to themselves or who are referred to as Csángós in present day Romania. For one

reason or another, the vast majority of Moldavian Csángós preferred to declare themselves to be Romanian in the national census. (Kapalo 3)

A population range of between 270,000 (if Catholicism is the only criterion) and a few thousand (if other criteria are used) have been reported for Harghita County. Ghimeș-Făget is located in this county, which is said to have the highest percentage of Hungarians in Romania (Ghimeș-Făget Area, a Short Presentation).

Not only are historical and recent statistics acknowledged as dubitable, almost all the documentation of these people done before census-taking is considered biased or unreliable. It is difficult to assess the reliability of the assorted and varied reports from diplomats, travelers, researchers, or local ministers who had some contact with the Csángó (Gábor 51). A problem with all sources is the failure to differentiate between Roman Catholics and Hungarians: "every Catholic is automatically counted as Hungarian regardless of what language he/she speaks..."(Gábor 51). The issue is further confused because two different ethnic Hungarian populations, the Székely of Bukovina (formerly a historic region within Moldavia, see Appendix G) and the Csángó, were living outside the boundaries of the Hungarian Kingdom in the 19th century<sup>44</sup> (Gábor 53).

### 3. Labeling

Given the above, it is not difficult to see why the question of which of the dispersed Hungarian ethnic minorities can rightfully be labeled Csángó has been so debated in the

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<sup>44</sup> Though there may be some "traces of common heritage" and later waves of immigration intermingled with the 1<sup>st</sup> settlers, there is a difference in when the two groups migrated to Moldavia. The Csángó arrived in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries as the defense system of the Hungarian Kingdom moved eastward. The Székely from Transylvania fled to Moldavia in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gábor specifically cites 1764 as a year of departure due to massacre. Later in the '70s and '80s the Székely moved to Bukovina, which was under Austrian rule at the time (Gábor 53; Sándor 318).

literature. Not only is this issue a point of contention among scholars, as we found in our research, it is also contested among the people themselves.

Different usage indicates that not all neighboring peoples recognize the same features as distinctive for ethnic classification. This observation raises such interesting questions as: “To what extent may the criteria claimed by members differ from the diagnostics by which outsiders recognize them?” How much change in defining criteria can occur before a people cease to exist in its own eyes or those of others?” (Moerman 1223).

Regardless of this lack of consensus on the issue, for our purposes, the individuals we encountered in Ghimeș-Făget who identified as Csángó are considered as such despite how disputed this may be by academics. Up to this point, the history and description of Csángó has mostly been of the Moldavian Csángó. As previously stated, this is due to the fact that the group in Moldavia is better known and the majority of English language literature on Csángó concerns the Csángó in Moldavia. In the literature, there are only brief discussions of other groups labeled or self-identified as Csángó. Given this, the history and literature on the Moldavian Csángó can be considered general background information on the same or related ethnicity like that of Ghimeș-Făget. The Roman Catholic Priest we interviewed, a self-described Csángó and Csángó researcher (he is writing a book on them) identified the Ghimeș-Făget Csángó, although he himself was Moldavian: “There are different forms of Csángó. There are the Csángó of the Ghimeș area. There are the Csángó of the Brasov area. And also Csángó from Bukovina ....” (May 23, 2008. Boznak 8).

Kapalo identifies two other groups referred to as Csángó by Hungarian speakers other than the Moldavian Csángó: the Gyimes Csángós and the Hetfalu Csángós. “The Gyimes

Csángós live astride the historic Moldavian-Transylvanian border, in the Trotuș valley, and share some cultural traits with the Moldavian population” (Kapalo 4). In the essay “About the Demography of the Moldavian Csángó” Vilmos states: “Csángó is the official designation as well as popular name for Hungarians living in Moldavia” (117). However, he mentions that ethnic Hungarians in the Gyimes/Ghimeș Pass, where our study was conducted, and in Hétfalu/Săcele near Brașov are also *called* Csángó, but does not indicate his approval of this use and points out that the term is sometimes used even for Székely (Vilmos 117). Vilmos does not approve of the use of the term Csángó for Székely and notes: “the majority of researchers disagree with the use of the term Csángó as a general designation for them” noting the importance of differentiating between the earlier Moldavian Hungarians who settled in the Middle Ages and the “fleeing” Székelys who arrive in 17 to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>45</sup> (Vilmos 118).

Robin Baker also notes: “Outside historic Moldavia, in the Ghimeș valley and in the ‘hétfalusi’ villages near Brașov, other so-called Csángó communities exist.” However, he contradicts Vilmos and Kapalo: “It is widely accepted that these people are the descendants of Transylvanian Széklers, and their dialect bears little relationship to that of the Moldavian Csángós” (659). To add to the confusion, because the differences between the “folk culture, language, [and] historical consciousness” of the Csángó and Székely have disappeared over time with assimilation and acculturation, the Székely, “whose ancestors never considered themselves Csángó,” sometimes accept this label when it is applied to them (Vilmos 118).

The term is supposedly used by both the Csángó and Székely “to describe someone who belongs to neither side...someone who is no longer either Romanian or Hungarian” and has also acquired negative connotations (Vilmos 118). Negativity associated with the Csángó label was

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<sup>45</sup> There are many labels researchers use for the Csángó and Székely in Moldavia, including Moldavian Hungarians and Moldavian Székely; Csángó Hungarians and Székely Hungarians. Overall, the term “Csángó” is generally used as a broad label (Vilmos 118)

encountered during our field study: At least one informant told us "...another ethnic group, the Székely, think Csángó are a negative part of Hungarian culture...." (Interview: Ethnographic Museum Director, Field Notes. May 26, 2008. Spotts 16). The prevalence of this belief is documented by Kapalo: the Csángó may not only "under communicate" their identity around Romanians, but also among Hungarians (14). This is particularly the case among Székler Hungarians, who consider the Moldavian Csángó "ethnically tainted" from living surrounded by Romanians and as "ethnic traitors" who compromised their true identity, despite the two group's similar linguistic and religious traditions (14).

#### **IV. The self-identification of the Csángó**

The kind of ethnographic research that has been carried out on the Csángó, as well as the lack of consensus regarding the historical record, have both contributed to the ambiguity surrounding the Csángó. This is compounded by the lack of strong self-description among the Csángó. Another issue is that neither scholars nor the Csángó have attempted to link the Csángó to a set or "sum of cultural traits" that would provide distinct minority representation in modern society (Kapalo 12). This can be contrasted with the Roma, another minority in Romania, who are well represented in society through activists and political groups. The Roma have resultantly gained more minority rights and have started to exploit the economic opportunities associated with tourism.

As previously discussed, the Csángó have maintained a more or less traditional society in which their religion and the Roman Catholic Church, despite its treatment of the people, remain the foundations of Csángó society. They lack strong ties to any nation, in part because the Csángó migrated prior to the formation of the Hungarian nation in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century (Sándor 321). “Moldavian Csángó are the only group of Hungarian speakers who did not become part of the Hungarian nation” (Vilmos 137). For these reasons, the Csángó do not connect their ethnic identity with a national identity the way Hungarian citizens and more recent diasporas from Hungary do. What distinguishes them from other ethnic Hungarians is their traditional world view, their Roman Catholic religion, and their loyalty to the immediate territory where they live (Sándor 321). In answer to the question, “what is your nationality”, a Csángó would answer “I’m Catholic,” and today, after centuries of assimilation and acculturation, this is often the primary feature, not language use, that distinguishes the Csángó from their Orthodox Romanian neighbors (Sándor 321).

#### **A. Preservation issues**

Much of the debate over the Csángó’s status as an ethnic minority and lack of “place” in modern political life seems to come from scholars and Hungarian nationalists wanting, for their own reasons, to preserve what they perceive as their nation’s “ancient roots.” Preserving the ancient dialect or culture does not seem important to Csángó as scholars believe it should be. For the Csángó, language and identity simply do not hold the same value or ideological meaning as it does for those who are products of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist movements that resulted in the modern Hungarian nation and society.<sup>46</sup> The following are some of the other factors that Gábor and Vilmos believe prevent (Moldavian) Csángó political unification and ethnic self-identification:

There is no intelligentsia or economic middle class: The Csángó in Moldavia have maintained something like a feudal society throughout the era of “national rebirth” and this hindered the development of a middle class that would have “been the preserver and cultivator of Hungarian

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<sup>46</sup> This included among other things language reforms, political and cultural movements, and the 1848 war of independence (Vilmos 137)



national spirit, a social layer that could have mediated the elements of modern national culture forming in Hungary during the Age of Reform” (Gábor 53). The discrimination in public schools and the closing and reopening of Hungarian universities throughout history have adversely affected the education of Hungarians. This perhaps also prevented the development of an intelligentsia among the Csángó. The Church hindered the development of an “ecclesiastic intelligentsia of national spirit” through the use of primarily Romanian in the Churches and the dearth of Hungarian priests<sup>47</sup>, resulting in the weak congregational connection with foreign priests (Gábor 53). Without the intellectuals to “acquaint the people with the nation’s constituent features”, the Csángó remained largely unaware of their commonalities with Hungary (Vilmos 137).

No effective value of language as equal to ethnic identity: The Moldavian Csángó do not seem to attribute any symbolic or cohesive value to their use of the Hungarian language. While their language use may distinguish them from their neighbors, it does not necessarily characterize them as Csángó. Because their relationship to the language is not tied to an ideology, “they regard the phenomenon of language loss as an inevitable part of modernization rather than as a tragedy” and also do not consider the Moldavian dialect, for example, to be identical to the one spoken in Carpathian Basin (Vilmos 137).

No folklore-nationality connection: Elements of what outsiders perceive as folk culture and a traditional lifestyle hold no symbolism. The Csángó seem unaware of national values contained within folklore and folk culture or of the fact that traditional culture can be a powerful means of strengthening national unity. There is no Csángó bourgeoisie to treasure and idealize the folk lifestyle or dedicate themselves to its preservation. For the Csángó, folk cultural elements are

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<sup>47</sup> During the formative years of the Romanian state, “the church was always careful to send priests to Moldavia brought up in spirit of Romanian nationalism to act as channels of official ideology” (Vilmos 137)

simply aspects of daily life and they do not necessarily see material culture, as they themselves possess it, as either traditional or somehow sacred. In addition: “Perhaps surprisingly for a minority celebrated for its archaic dialect features and unique ethnographic customs, the Csángós do not appear to possess a general folk belief regarding their origin...” (Baker 660).

Continuing political, geographical, and linguistic isolation: The majority of the Csángó (certainly the groups in Moldavia) continue to have no contact with Hungarian “high culture.” Thus the associated values “remain out of their [the Csángós’] reach due to absence of proper institutional network and low levels of literacy in Hungarian” (Vilmos 137).

The Csángó have not actively preserved much of what outsiders perceive as their culture beyond their religion, which remains their primary means of identification. Without any markers other than religion, the Csángó seem to have little in common with other ethnic minorities in Romania. In fact, by all European ethnological standards, how they present and think about themselves does not constitute a distinct “people” or ethnicity. All these distinguishing markers, derived from 19<sup>th</sup> century social and intellectual movements, are absent, yet the people remain. Further, because they have no real political representation and because the Romanian state does not recognize them as a minority,<sup>48</sup> they are excluded from the nation’s human rights system: “It is because of the Moldavian Csángós’ sometimes ambiguous, ever-shifting sense of ethnic and national identity, that they had difficulty in pursuance of their rights as a minority group” (Sándor 318; Kapalo 2). They lack activists, a collective identity, or ethnic political movements like what the Roma have. Because of this, they are denied rights other minorities in Romania have, such as the right to native language classes (Sándor 319). The state justifies this on the grounds that Csángó are “Hungarianized Romanians” who should re-assimilate to their original language and culture. This parallels the Vatican’s century’s long denial of services for Csángó in

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<sup>48</sup> “All ethnic minorities [in Romania] except Gypsies are classified as “co-inhabiting nationalities” (Levinson 67).

Hungarian (319). Currently, these assimilationist policies violate international norms but escape notice because Csángó do not have ethnic minority status. Similarly, if priests promote “Language shift” orally, there is no written evidence, such as laws/orders prohibiting the use of Hungarian, to condemn this practice (Sándor 328). However, because the Csángó have not redefined themselves into a minority or ethnicity, it is debatable whether they would want such linguistic accommodations. If they more frequently identify themselves as Roman Catholic in the public sphere, perhaps this is the ethnic marker more important to them than linguistic rights.

## **B. Choice of expression**

Historically, it can be argued that there was little advantage to self-identify as Csángó. Such identification more often than not was, in fact, a detriment and an obstacle in everyday life. The term was stigmatized and the Csángó were ostracized by both the Hungarians and the Romanians due to their “backwards” lifestyle (until the recent bourgeoisie push toward preservation). It was perhaps easier to conform, voluntarily or not, through forced assimilation, and “become” part of the majority. While there have been social and political tensions, this population has a tradition of accommodation and centuries of working together at the local levels with both Romanians and Hungarians.

Though there has been compromise, in the realm of ethnic relations the “under communication” of ethnic membership by the Csángó and their lack of participation in the public sphere—political, social, institutional, etc.—has perpetuated an asymmetrical balance of power. If the Csángó ethnic identity is only communicated (and meaningful) in the private sphere: “with immediate neighbors or within closed social situations inside the community,” the identity will continue to have no relevance politically or economically and remain stigmatized<sup>49</sup> (Kapalo 14).

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<sup>49</sup> The Csángó, others have observed, tend to “under communicate” identity around Hungarians (notably Széklers) who stigmatize them as “tainted” from living in communities Romanians (Kapalo 14).

These factors, combined with the fact that members of this community choose only to identify as Catholic and not Csángó, can account for both the quality and quantity of ethnographic data on the Csángó (how can you study the Csángó if you can't find any?). When the people themselves do not describe, assume, or mark off a particular identity, one is left with only historical observation, conjecture, and ambiguity. The lack of a collective identity, or perhaps more accurately, without the reproduction and dissemination of that identity in public and political domains, this ethnicity (sociologically) is no longer relevant: "If members of an ethnic group don't acknowledge their ethnic membership and don't communicate it, the ethnic aspect ceases to be relevant in social interaction" (Kapalo 9). Ethnic representation does not seem important to the people themselves in ways academics and politicians can easily identify with and are often trying to (re)create. While the Csángó continue to decrease in number and seem to have little or no active interest in preserving what outsiders deem their culture, academics and politicians continue to debate their origin and ethnicity largely perhaps as a means to justify or renegotiate territorial borders. As discussed in Section III, both Hungarians and Romanians claim the Csángó and use them to claim Transylvania for themselves.

## **V. In Ghimeș-Făget**

With the controversy surrounding the origin, ethnicity, and geographic location of Csángó, as well as the lack of a strong, explicit self-identification as Csángó, it is notable we did find Csángó in Ghimeș-Făget. However, the question that interested us is how and why this identity was assumed there, and what is the significance of its meaning? This may have something to do with a renewed interest among Hungarians in the roots of Hungarian traditional

culture. It also could be a way for a village to preserve their own way of life, what others see as traditional or even as archaic, in the face of modern pressures.

### **A. Hungarian and Romanian self-identification**

Harghita County is known for having a large Hungarian population, so it was not surprising to encounter many Hungarian speakers. We required tri-lingual interpreters for our interviews, since we never knew which language our informants would speak from day to day. When Ghimeș-Făget villagers were asked about their ethnic identification, they tended to give one of two answers: Romanian or Hungarian.<sup>50</sup> We did not ask directly about ethnic self-identification, but the subject did come up indirectly or with follow-up questions about the Csángó. In some cases, though, an informant would state his or her ethnicity<sup>51</sup> when discussing with the translator which language to use in an interview, but questions like “How do you define yourself?” were avoided. The subject of ethnicity (especially in relation to language use) seemed both self-evident and taken for granted for these people living in a historically and currently multiethnic area, where the need to communicate in multiple languages was part of daily life.

Often in an interview, an individual would report a multiethnic background—Romanian mother, Hungarian father; German father, Romanian Mother—and even at the same time admit to being “Csángó.” This led us to revise what we had thought it meant to be Csángó in Ghimeș-Făget. Linguistic and cultural accommodation seemed to represent to them the natural order of things. Inter-marriage and bilingual families were not uncommon:

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<sup>50</sup> Of the 30 people involved in interviews, 12 informants identified as Romanian, 3 identified as only Hungarian, and 8 identified as Hungarian and Csángó, but 4 of the 8 did not initially identify themselves as Csángó in interviews. (See Appendix J).

<sup>51</sup> The categories of ethnicity and nationality are not clear in Ghimeș-Făget. Nor are they necessarily mutually exclusive. It is possible some individuals consider themselves ethnically Hungarian, but also see themselves as Romanian citizens. Others could mean they are both ethnically Hungarian and part of the Hungarian nation, but just “displaced”, and would rather not acknowledge their Romanian citizenship. In addition, individuals identifying themselves as Csángó could have a variety of opinions concerning their ethnicity and nationality.

A: So, He said that he knows many cases, where, you know, Hungarians marry the Romanians. Uh, it is something that is very common. And uh, to give an example he said his mother is Hungarian and his father is half Romanian, half German. So, uh, it's a mixed family. And uh, he said that there are different kinds of events that bring together all the people.

(Train Station Chief. May 24, 2008. Spotts 12)

A: He says that uh, his wife is Romanian. His wife is Romanian, and uh, uh, because uh she's taking care more of his two daughters, they uh speak more Romanian. They speak some Hungarian, but not so much. He is insisting... for them to learn Hungarian too because he speaks, uh, both language [He is Hungarian].

Q: ... Can you ask him if uh, in the village uh he knows many cases of bilingualism? Or if ... more uh, it's ... known?

A: uh, he says that uh, he knows, he knows uh families that are bilingual.

(House Builder. May 24, 2008. Spotts 15)

Bilingualism was common and positively regarded by many we interviewed. This may be in part because it can give individuals a commercial and career advantage:

...maybe a population of the commune are speaking both languages good enough.

Uh, he says that he...you know he made his school in Romanian, he had to in Romanian, but at home he spoke Hungarian. But he was lucky this way because he learned both. And uh, now, while working he is speaking mostly Romanian because a lot of the employees, a lot of bosses are Romanian so you have to speak Romanian. 90% of the time uh he speaks, uh Romanian.

... And he considers it an advantage for everyone to, to learn also Romanian, because, uh, you use mostly Romanian when you work, uh, he says that Hungarian is mostly optional, and he, yeah, will actually uh support people to learn both. And now she [his daughter] is two, she can count to 10 both in Hungarian and Romanian.

(Train Station Chief. May 24, 2008. Spotts 7-9)<sup>52</sup>

If bilingualism is voluntary, seen positively, and intermarriage occurs frequently, the kind of tension between Hungarians and Romanians politicians or intellectuals describe does not seem to exist in Ghimeș-Făget. Given how long the area has been multiethnic, how could there not be intermarriage and situational language use? If using either Hungarian or Romanian in business will allow you to serve more customers or advance in your career, then it makes sense to learn both languages. Compromise, linguistically and perhaps culturally, helped keep the village running, but perhaps these kinds of compromises over the years led to the gradual disappearance of what were regarded as less advantageous identities. If identifying as Csángó could create problems with Romanians and Hungarians, then why not compromise? There is of course no distinct line between the kinds of social compromises described here and assimilation. It may simply be that just as using Hungarian can be situational, Csángó identity became situational and limited only to the private sphere. In other words, one reason for the lack of a strong Csángó identity in either public or private could be the result of centuries of Romanian and Hungarian coexistence and compromise.

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<sup>52</sup> The Train Station Chief is probably unique in that he uses Romanian at work since in Harghita most of the population is Hungarian. This is, presumably, due to the nature of his job, i.e., that he works for the Romanian national railway.

## B. Csángó self-identification

There was great variety in how informants described what it meant to be Csángó and this was rarely the initial or primary way people chose to identify themselves. The majority of villagers seemed to initially use other terms to define themselves. Csángó identity did not come up in discussions of daily life but only when the discussion turned to traditional arts, dancing, and other elements of expressive culture. For example, in the case of the House Builder, Gas Station Owner, and Chief of the Train Station, all three first identified as Hungarians in their interviews, but later on, when the subject came up, they acknowledged they were Csángó: “Q: ... well he said that he’s a Hungarian man and... he’s Hungarian ... he lives here but he recognizes himself as a Hungarian man.... Q: What does it mean to be Csángó? A: He says that he, he [sees] himself as Csángó and he ...he knows that a Csángó means, um people who migrate, who move, you know. To move one place together...” (House Builder. May 24, 2008. Spotts 4-5). How questions about ethnicity were answered in Ghimeș-Făget depended on the context—if a discussion of material culture or “traditions” had preceded any reference to the Csángó, individuals were more likely to self-identify, in one way or another, as Csángó:

Q: Could you also ask him if apart from the landscape and the fact that uh the region is uh, uh speaking naturally the Hungarian, if there are also other appeals for tourists ... uh folklore or other, uh other appeals?

A: uh, he says that they have a lot of traditions here, that they could be used. They have uh, beautiful traditional dances, they have traditional costumes, uh all the, you know, centuries old uh. ... he for example when he was uh younger he was part of the, um the, of a group that was uh doing traditional Csángó dances. Uh, he has uh traditional Csángó, um, um, costume that he used to wear....



Q: Can you ask him um, what does it mean to be Csángó?

A: So he says that he also is Csángó ....

(Train Station Chief. May 24, 2008. Spotts 6)

In contrast, the Pension owner (Mr. Deaky) and the Museum Director, who both made the promotion, preservation, and presentation of traditional culture their business,<sup>53</sup> identified as both Csángó and Hungarian.<sup>54</sup> For them, both identities were equally important. However, their situation was unique because they, in explicit terms, demonstrated a Csángó identity and this gave them a commercial advantage. The daily performance of a Csángó identity helped justify and legitimize both their businesses and their “right” to market and sell services and goods related to the Csángó.

Another individual, the Wood Carver, identified as both Hungarian and Csángó. He assumed the Csángó identity because of what he had learned about the Csángó of the area on a radio program:

He says he is Hungarian but [also]...he is Csángó ...[he is] Catholic he was born here in Ghimeș and his wife is from the commune and they spoke Hungarian all their life and they only learned Romanian in school, then I asked him why he has that year written on the wall [1624] and he said he was listening to a radio show

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<sup>53</sup> The Deaky Pension was not just a guesthouse. It was, more of a cultural “experience”. These performances or “reenactments” were marketed to Hungarian tourists (the website is only in Hungarian) who visited, often by the busload, to witness “rustic” Hungarian peasant life. They were served traditional food, often prepared on an open fire, and entertained with traditional music and dancing with audience participation encouraged. Each evening ended with a collective singing of the Hungarian national anthem. Their stay also usually involved a visit to the nearby historic border between Moldova and Transylvania, and to the Ethnographic Museum in town. The Museum Director collected traditional clothing and items, pictures, and had also published several books on the region and the Csángó. The museum where she displayed these items and sold souvenirs consisted of two large rooms in her home.

<sup>54</sup> The Ethnographic Museum director seemed to want to define Csángó as having nothing to do with being Romanian. The director told us to be Csángó is to “be Hungarian first,” which did not seem to mean that she valued the Hungarian identity above her Csángó identity, but rather that she wanted to stress that she did not see herself as Romanian. She made it clear that she was proud to work for the benefit of the ethnic group [through her museum] and argued that while some people say Csángó are mixed (culturally/nationally), this is not true. For her to be Csángó means being Hungarian above all other things (Field Notes. May 26, 2008. Spotts 16).

[about the Csángó] and they were talking about it and he just wrote it on the wall.

(Wood Carver. May 29, 2008. Houston 2)

The Wood Carver's assumption of the Csángó identity (and the reason for it) was perhaps the most unique we came across. Despite having grown up in Ghimeș, he was unaware of the prospect of being something other than Hungarian until he heard a radio program about the Csángó while working in his studio. Then, it seems, because he spoke Hungarian and lived in the area, he decided he also must be Csángó. This raises questions about the value this identity has at present and how it might be assumed in today's world. It is not clear why someone would so suddenly choose to self-identify, especially with such a problematic (stigmatized) ethnicity.

Seven people identified themselves only as Csángó, but not all were very self-confident about it or seemed to have strong, direct claims for this identification. Two Roma men, for example, like the Wood Carver, had no more justification for their Csángó identity than being members of the local community.<sup>55</sup> The Roma lived in this area and spoke Hungarian; therefore they were Csángó and used only this identification in their interview (Field notes. May 30, 2008. Burcea 9; Holditch 7; Sheil 20). Only the former train employee and train history aficionado voluntarily and immediately self-identified as Csángó: "He was born in Ghimeș in 1945; his parents came there in 1940. [He] considers himself Csángó and is not ashamed to admit it [although] sometimes being Csángó implies running away or escaping from the Hungarian regions"<sup>56</sup> (Field Notes. June 3, 2008. Klimaszewski 17).

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<sup>55</sup> Additionally, The Gas Station Owner identified himself as Csángó because he lived in the area: "He considers himself mostly Hungarian. His children say that they are 100% Hungarian. People in this valley are Csángó, therefore he is a Csángó" (Field Notes. May 31, 2008. LaFountain 8).

<sup>56</sup> It is possible that we put words in our informants' mouths and that village gossip made the purpose of our interviews clear to others we had not yet interviewed. Thus, it is possible that the former train employee, one of the last individuals we interviewed, declared he was Csángó because he had heard that is what we would be asking about. However this would not account either for manner in which he defined himself as Csángó, nor would it necessarily explain why he so readily defined himself as Csángó.

People who seemed more certain or proud of their Csángó identity tended to be the older individuals we interviewed, including the widow, who had lived in the village 62 years, and the old weaver and her husband (Widow. May 24, 2008. Klimaszewski 8). These people were all probably in their 70s, still farmed for livelihood, and thus lived more traditional lives,<sup>57</sup> and had homes further away from the main road of the village. The widow seemed quite isolated, and sadly, old family artifacts and traditional hand weavings appeared to be her only companions, except for the young man who helped her care for her house and would inherit it. The majority of her family members were deceased: “A: She has two sisters that died ... She was the eldest. And now she is alone. [...] Her sister has grown children who are staying not far from here [...] They sometimes come here and help her and talk to her” (Widow. May 24, 2008. Klimaszewski 2).

The Weaver and her husband were clearly proud of their regional culture and handmade possessions, which they kept in separate rooms for display, upstairs, away from small living quarters on the first floor. They continued to weave and make and embroidered traditional clothing as well. They had hand-built their house in 1967 and decorated it with traditional stenciling on the walls, etc., which they told us people do not do anymore.<sup>58</sup> They were still actively involved with folk dancing troupes in the 1990s, although the Weaver learned these dances when she was young. These troupes traveled and performed throughout Hungary, where the weaver also sold some of her handmade goods (Field Notes. May 30, 2008. Spotts 25-26).

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<sup>57</sup> The weaver and her husband, although seemingly too old for such chores by our standards, were getting ready to take the cows up to pasture the next day (May 31). The husband would stay with them the rest of the season until September. They made their own cheese, and seemed to live in one room, a kitchen, which had two small beds and a small bathroom off to the side. The weaver was washing dishes outside in several buckets of water when we arrived, and hanging them on the fence posts to dry. They told us they do not need most modern things and that their house is traditional and typical for most old people in the region. However, they did have two cell phones to call their children. (Field Notes. May 30, 2008. Klimaszewski 12-17; Spotts 25-26)

<sup>58</sup> The Widow and her deceased husband, who she married at 17, also built their house (Widow. May 24, 2008. Klimaszewski. 2.8).

### C. Alternate means of identification

Interviews and participant observation suggest that in the daily life of Ghimeș-Făget, ethnicity is not a major issue. Many villagers were fluent, or at least could communicate, in two languages, and intermarriage seemed quite common, creating bilingual households in which parents taught children both languages. There were even cases of religious compromise, although the husband seems to have the upper hand when it comes to the children's religion: "he said that uh he's accepting it, because uh you know the, his wife is Orthodox. Anyway, when they got married they became a Catholic family [i.e. the *children* are Catholic]. And he's accepting you know uh her religion and so" (House Builder. May 24, 2008. Spotts 16). In the village, people have learned to coexist despite ethnic differences and seem to have managed thus far even through some very difficult periods (communism, etc.). Today villagers in Ghimeș-Făget do not seem very concerned if their neighbor happens to be Romanian, Hungarian, or Csángó. This differs from academic and political discussions where ethnicity often plays a very important role.

Hungarian and Romanian ethnicity may be less of a concern or difference in daily life than another less-examined means of self-identification: religion. In Ghimeș-Făget, ethnicity is not necessarily the most important marker of identity. As previously noted in Section IV, individuals may consider other means of identification more relevant or valuable, and may choose to express their ethnic identity only when it is not perceived to be a detriment. This identification with religion accords with the medieval world view the Csángó are often said to possess, one where religion is the foundation of society and has comparable valence to the modern self-identification with nationality or ethnicity. It may be that ethnicity is too "modern" a construct for the majority of the Csángó. The refusal or inability to think about the self in terms that have political resonance would help explain the Csángó's place in society and status in

comparison to other ethnic minorities in Romania today. The ontological distance between the label and social reality at a village may also help explain the kind of self-identifications we found among those who do acknowledge this identity.

The socio-political and intellectual-powered pursuit and encouragement of strong ethnic identification in this minority may have made it more difficult analytically to see how tied this ethnicity is to the religious declaration of self. The identification of ethnicities, be it Hungarian, Romanian, or Csángó, does not seem as important as the religious divisions in Ghimeș-Făget. In Ghimeș-Făget, the tension found was generated by religion, and thus more an issue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, not between the Romanians and Hungarians, no matter how nationality was defined. The two churches, not ethnicity, defined social spheres and opposition in the village. While most Hungarians tended to be Roman Catholic and Romanians Orthodox, nationality seemed less important than faith as a marker of self.

In interviews conducted toward the end of our stay in the village, the rivalry and tensions between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox priests came to our attention. The Roman Catholic Priest elaborated on this in his second interview:

[he invites] the orthodox priest [to come] and do the celebrations together or the dates, but he didn't want to collaborate. And after that he wrote an article in the newspaper saying that the Catholic priest is nationalistic and that he does not want to collaborate with him. So he says that he never heard him doing anything for the people in the village ... The orthodox never comes to help ....

(Transcription. June 5, 2008. Szocs 7)

The Catholic Priest also said the problem was not just the Orthodox Priest, but the Orthodox Church, which perpetuated tension between the two religions, and consequently between Hungarians and Romanians:

It is very hard to make people understand that Hungarians aren't against Romanians. Still the Orthodox Church and the school says that Romanians are good and they are more variable and superior and that we [and that] Hungarians are against them. He said that the truth is that the Orthodox Church is also sustaining this idea... He says that unfortunately Roman Catholic Church there are extremist [also]. (Transcription. June 5, 2008. Szocs 6)

Unfortunately, just when we began unearthing this source of tension, our time in the village had come to an end, so the extent of the religious division is unknown; we were not able to further investigate all the parameters related to religion. For example, if the tension between Hungarians and Romanians is due not to their ethnicity, but religion, it could be the individuals who were less religious would be less negative toward members of the other religion. While religious identification may be more important to people than ethnicity, little of the academic literature on ethnic tensions in Romania focuses on religion. Nor does this literature examine the kinds of mutual accommodation we found in Ghimeș-Făget: intermarriage, bilingualism, and social/individual comprise.

#### **D. Situational ethnicity**

We were less than successful in finding the Csángó, perhaps because we focused, as much of the literature does, on ethnicity in a village where intermarriage, bilingualism, and accommodation is common, and ethnicity does not appear to be a primary marker of identification. Nor does it play as important of a role in local society as religion. To reiterate—

we must consider that centuries of cultural and geographic isolation in the Carpathians isolated the Csángó from the social, political, and technological evolution other Hungarians in Hungary experienced. Consequently, the modern link between self and ethnicity we tend to take for granted did not reach and does not necessarily apply to the Csángó. Thus, few Csángó self-identify in ways that accord with today's political and intellectual rhetoric.

These issues made our research a challenge. We found few individuals who primarily identified as Csángó. The basis on which they made this claim led us to challenge not just the category, but the evidence informants who made this claim provided. A majority of villagers interviewed had trouble describing what it meant to be Csángó beyond geography or nationality. Informants identified themselves as Csángó late in interviews, often only after the interviewers brought up the subject. What we found in Ghimeș-Făget contrasts with their portrayal in literature as relics of medieval society, noble preservers of a true, pure, unaltered "Hungarianess" that has been lost to modernity in Hungary. This view of the Csángó has been promoted especially by ethnologists since the Csángó have been "rediscovered" by scholars,<sup>59</sup> and has been embraced by Hungarians in general who see today's Csángó as survivors of their noble past. Additional contemporary discourse, from both scholars and the general population, consider the endangered status of Csángó, and attempt to define, inventory, and preserve them, to further clarify their place in respect to Hungarian society throughout history.

However, the research of historians and intellectuals seems less relevant to the Csángó on a local level. In fact, so much research has focused on finding the ethnic origin of the Csángó that research on the ethnic (self)identity has been neglected, except when inspired by national

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<sup>59</sup> "To the Csángós, the Hungarian "motherland" has been more distant and symbolic than to any other population in Transylvania. Hungarian intellectuals have, however, since the 1970s, capitalized on this distance. In Hungary, there has been a rising awareness among Hungarian intellectuals about the fate of the Csángós, and ties have been continually reinforced between the two groups..." (Kürti 113).

politics (Kapalo 9). Thus, the push to preserve the ethnic identity and culture of these people comes from the outside, which helps explain the lack of any kind of Csángó resurgence in Ghimeș-Făget.

Further, there seemed to be a generational divide when it came to understanding and expressing the Csángó identity. For villagers still in the workforce or active in public domains, it did not seem to be an important or valued means of identifying oneself. Older informants (Widow, Weaver) seemed more confident in their Csángó identity and more direct about what it meant to them. The other individuals who said they were Csángó could often not articulate reasons for this beyond residence in the village or the fact that they spoke Hungarian (Roma, Gas Station Owner, Wood Carver). However, the Csángó identity did seem to be context-dependent, as it most often emerged when traditional folk music or material culture were discussed (Train Station Chief, Mr. Deaky, Ethnographic Museum Director).

As interest in the Csángó identity increases, through tourism and the Hungarian intellectual and national pursuit of their “roots,” this new awareness and acceptance of the Csángó ethnicity may begin to change how people self-identify. In keeping with modern definitions of self, in many cases, Csángó seems to be an identity that can more or less casually be assumed in different situations, such as when participating in a dance group (Chief of Train Station). However, the process of this shift in how identity can be defined seems to be slow. During communism, it was not prudent to be distinguished from Romanians, so the Csángó identity was rarely claimed. There was no resurgence of the Csángó ethnic identity or a display of the Csángó culture after the fall of communism; there seems to have been no local pressure or need to preserve this identity, so it was presumably further diluted. In addition, after the Revolution, processes of assimilation did delete minorities. Accommodation and compromise in



Ghimeș-Făget also seems to have led to the decline of identification with the Csángó so that there are only a few publicly-active Csángó (Mr. Deaky, Ethnographic Museum Director). Despite the growing awareness and potential advantage of the Csángó identity, not that many people self-describe as Csángó, and only a few have embraced the historical importance and economic potential of preserving the cultural artifacts—there is only one Csángó museum and Mr. Deaky's musical pension in Ghimeș-Făget.

### **E. Capitalization on the Csángó**

In Romania's new capitalist economy, cultural tourism has become an important part of the service industry. The Csángó identity has become a marketable commodity and welcoming tourists to the Csángó "homeland" is a profitable endeavor. While this potential has only been realized by a few people so far in Ghimeș-Făget, it could be key to the region's economic future:

He says that uh, also in, in time, he sees that uh, you know, tourism is growing here. He might consider, uh, you know, he has lots of uh space there, he might consider you know building small houses for the tourists, or you know, welcoming tourists in his house. Or maybe putting uh, put uh, internet in the house, you know, for the foreign tourists....

(House Builder. May 24, 2008. Spotts 11-12)

He says that heee, noticed [ui, more increasing?] in the [ui, amount?] of tourists that came after we joined the EU. But the problem here is not that they will not come, the problem is that they do not have any place to stay. Because except for Deaky's guesthouse and another guesthouse that is uh close to the ruins, uh, in the village there is no other place where you can stay except in the hotel that has like, nine uh rooms....*[omission- explanation of housing shortage during Pentecost]*

So, from his opinion if, this, all this, you know small guest houses, would uh appear, the tourists w-would increase. And the main, majority of the reason, they are [the majority is] coming here from ... from Hungary.

(Train Station Chief. May 24, 2008. Spotts 5)

For educated and patriotic Hungarians, the history of the Csángó has made them the reservoir that has preserved the essence of Hungarian culture: In the remote “cradle of Hungarian civilization,” “ [the] archaic locale, nationalists need a population or groups of coalescing ethnics whose mission is to carry on a culture deemed sacred by the elite” (Kürti 17). By embracing this view of the Csángó, villagers can attract Hungarians to the region to experience the traditional peasant life hailed in the Hungarian nationalistic literature and movements that glorified folk life, music, and craft—the archaic “Hungarianess” that has been preserved only in Transylvania.<sup>60</sup> Mr. Deaky has certainly embraced this mission with the Csángó “dinner theater” experience at his pension. If other villagers can link themselves to the “pristine” idyllic culture, regardless of whether it exists or not, and convincingly portray it to Hungarians searching for what they feel they have lost in modern Hungary, they can improve economic and social conditions for themselves in a region that today has high unemployment and much seasonal emigration for work.

It is important to point out that the traditions on display in Ghimeș-Făget are “recreated;” the dances and handicrafts are for tourists and visitors, not for the villagers themselves. However, given the history of the Csángó—these things may not matter, considering that religion was the only aspect of culture they have actively preserved. In Ghimeș-Făget we found what could be termed a “Disneylandization” of the Csángó, a performance and marketing of certain aspects of their culture that coincided with, and was supported by, a new interest in

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<sup>60</sup> This could be called a “Williamsburg- or Plymouth effect.”

cultural preservation that has diffused outwards from academia and the intelligentsia. In any case, the villagers seemed willing participants in the recreation of “traditional” cultural elements considered unimportant to the Csángó themselves. There may be political as well as economic motivations behind the cultural presentations.<sup>61</sup> If nationalistic Hungarians can give archaic traditional meaning to the elements of “Csángó” culture found in Ghimeș-Făget today, revive or “reproduce,” and promote the culture of the “original” inhabitants of Transylvania, maybe this can help legitimize claims to the Hungarian territory lost to them after WWI.<sup>62</sup>

Another similar period of “re-created” tradition and a re-discovery of the peasantry occurred in 1940 after the temporary revision of the Trianon borders. The Hungarian regime wanted to prove that even in the “sorely mutilated” areas of Hungary, traditional peasant art and folk life persisted. Thus many “state pageantries and lavish celebrations,” in which village groups were invited to participate, were presented as “real” for mostly western audiences: “On occasion, tourists were taken to some of the villages for a special fair. Antedating present-day ethnotourism, villagers paraded in their best, most colorful clothes and staged miniature wedding celebrations” (Kürti 101). This began a “mystification of the peasants” and tourists were invited to the region to observe “typical” peasant life and the “hospitality of the Hungarian peasant.”<sup>63</sup> These performances, however, had many negative effects, as Kürti explains:

...folk costumes became more colorful and showy, losing their authenticity in the process. Moreover, where dances were not “fiery” or “earthy” enough, steps, formations, and songs were added to impress the Western audiences. In some

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<sup>61</sup> Mr. Deaky was a strongly nationalistic Hungarian. He often traveled to Hungary and seemed to have some connections to the protests held on June 4<sup>th</sup> in Ghimeș-Făget and throughout Hungary (footnote 4).

<sup>62</sup> As discussed in Section III, both Hungarians and Romanians lay claim to the Csángó, as a means of claiming territory they both view as the cradle of their culture.

<sup>63</sup> “Since the industrial working class did not possess anything as colorful, richly embroidered, and distinct, it fell naturally upon the few selected peasant communities to carry the burden to play the “natives” in the nationwide reservation” (Kürti 101).

instances, ethnographers were eager to “authenticate” these invented stage productions. Their efforts, however, were met with resentment, both on the part of the organizers and in some cases the local village elites, who did not wish to be left out of the glory of state festivities.... (101)

The cultural tourism we witnessed in Ghimeș-Făget appears to be an attempt to demonstrate, like in the 1940s, that rich Hungarian peasant/folk life still persists in the Hungarian Transylvanian homeland, even if the evidence presented for this is recreation, a theatrical presentation. In equation of Csángó identity and culture with costumes and dances, the villagers supply what they have come to believe Hungarian tourists and intellectuals want. This tends to mask, or at least obscure, what goes on at local levels and these issues need to be researched and debated, especially if cultural tourism in Ghimeș-Făget increases.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Three weeks in the diverse and contested region of Transylvania was clearly not enough time to fully analyze or understand the villagers’ view of themselves. The short field study in Ghimeș-Făget provided an introduction to the challenges of ethnographic research, which are intensified when both the region and understandings of self are contested. The issues related to the Csángó cannot be resolved without further ethnographic research. The Csángó debate and the Romanian and Hungarian claims to Transylvania across time are intimately related and this needs to be examined in future research. Historical accounts available at present (plus the ideological reading of these texts) make it difficult to arrive at any consensus regarding the Csángó. Further, research that examines the situational expression of the Csángó identity at local, micro levels is needed. Research of this kind is necessary to determine if the Csángó continue to

face discrimination, and if so, what kind of political and social remedies might be useful and possible. However, any research on Csángó will continue to present a challenge since the Csángó do not necessarily express their ethnic and self identity with markers today's ethnic groups generally use to define themselves. It may be that to understand the Csángó other forms of self and ethnic identification will have to be identified and examined; there may be non-tangible dimensions or symbolic, immaterial activities of the everyday that Csángó use to identify and think about themselves. Despite a resurgence of interest in the Csángó, they remain difficult to find, perhaps because this identity has proven less than advantageous in the past. The Csángó continue to evade definition and, like Transylvania, they are claimed by two nations. However, the consensus or closure, both intellectual and political, Hungary and Romania seek with Transylvania and the Csángó is unattainable.

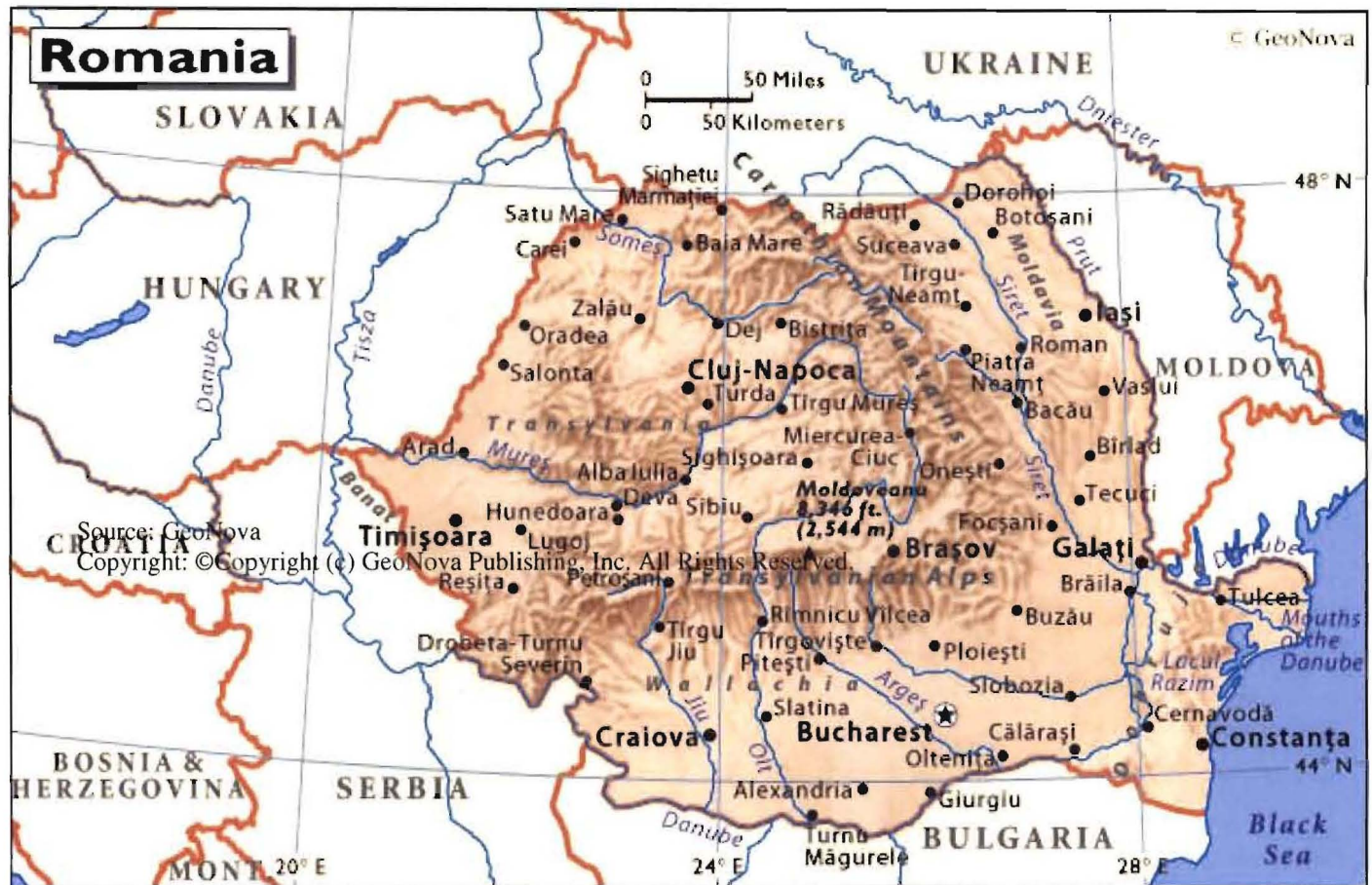
## Appendix A : Map of Central Europe



Source: [http://www.romaniatourism.com/europe\\_map.html](http://www.romaniatourism.com/europe_map.html)

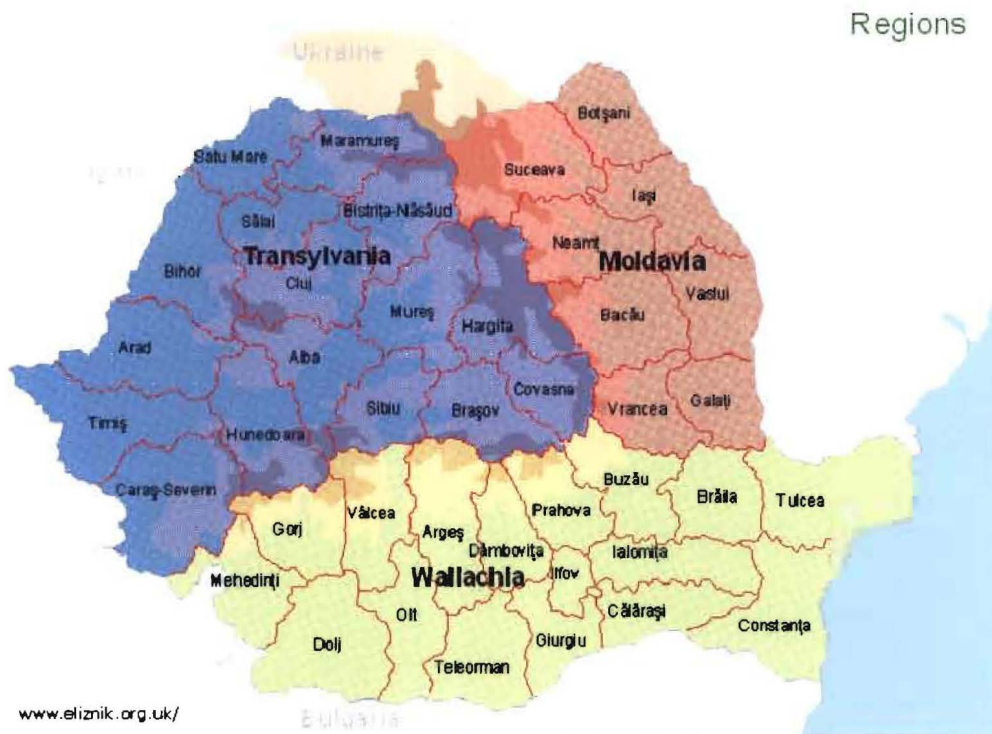


## Appendix B: Physical Map of Romania



Source: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=imh&AN=imh71894&site=ehost-live>

## Appendix C: Administrative and Historic Regions



Source: <http://www.eliznik.co.uk/>



Copyright 2008 Romanian Tourist Office

Source: [http://www.romaniatourism.com/hist\\_reg\\_map.html](http://www.romaniatourism.com/hist_reg_map.html)



## Appendix D: Transylvania

Transylvania 15th-17th century

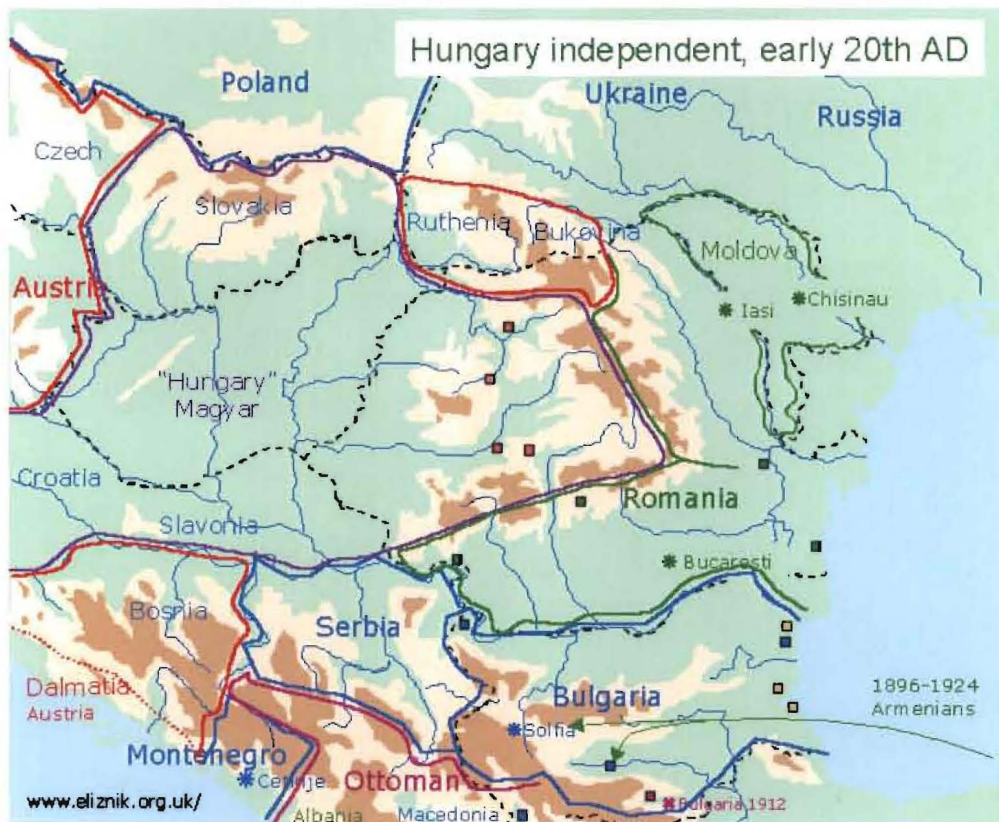


Transylvania 1913



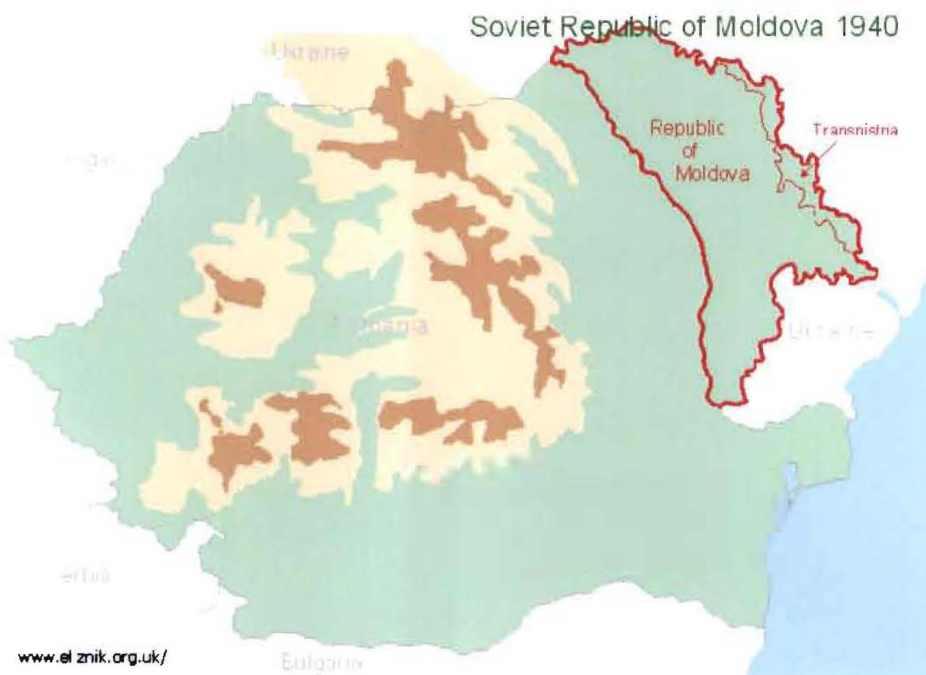
Source for the remaining maps: <http://www.eliznik.co.uk/>

## Appendix E: Hungary's territorial losses





## Appendix F: Moldavia



Contemporary Moldavia is a region in Romania, but only part of historic Moldavia. It was settled somewhat later than Romania's other main regions (Wallachia and Transylvania), and emerged as an independent principality in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, only to become a vassal state of Poland from 1387 until it accepted sovereignty from the Ottoman Turks in 1512 (after experiencing repeated invasions). At various times, the state included the regions of Bukovina (northern area lost to Austria in 1775) and all of Besarabia (eastern area; lost to Russia in 1812). The remaining area joined with Wallachia in 1862. "Geographically, Moldavia is roughly defined as the area extending between the eastern Carpathians, the Dniester River, and the Danube". The western remains part of Romania and the eastern part is now in the Republic of Moldova. "Moldavia." *Encyclopedia of Eastern Europe*. 2000.

## Appendix G: Bukovina



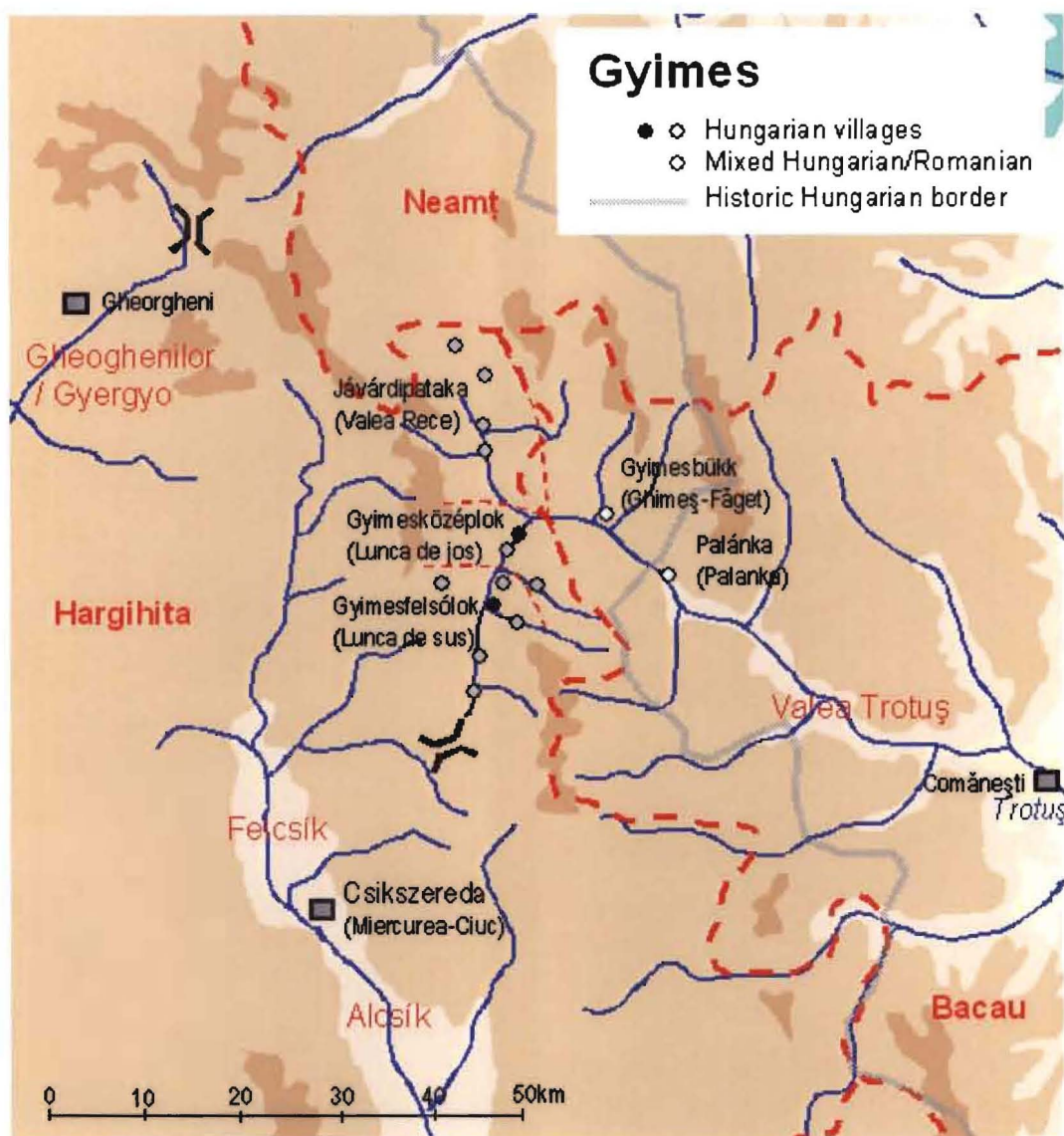
Bukovina is a historic region that was part of the principality of Moldavia until the 1775 annexation to the Habsburg Monarch, at which time the name Bukovina came into official use. The southern part of historic Bukovina is now in Romania.

“Bukovina.” Encyclopedia of Eastern Europe. 2000.





## Appendix I: Close-up of Ghimeş area



Source: <http://www.eliznik.org.uk/RomaniaEthno/maps/gyimes-m.htm>

## Appendix J: Self-identification of the interviewed villagers in Ghimeș-Făget

### Transcribed interviews

- 1) 2: Orthodox Priest (Romanian) and his wife (Romanian)
- 2) English Teacher at the Romanian School (Romanian)
- 3) 2: Village Doctors, husband and wife (both from the Republic of Moldova (speak Romanian, Russian, French) but identify as Romanian)
- 4) Catholic Cantor (Hungarian)
- 5) Mr. Deaky (Hungarian and Csángó)
- 6) Hungarian School Teacher (1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian; 2<sup>nd</sup> Csángó)\*
- 7) Wood Carver (Hungarian and Csángó)
- 8) House Builder (1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian; 2<sup>nd</sup> Csángó)\*
- 9) Train Station Chief (1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian; 2<sup>nd</sup> Csángó)\*
- 10) Ethnographic Museum Director (Hungarian and Csángó)
- 11) Gas Station Owner (1<sup>st</sup> Hungarian; 2<sup>nd</sup> Csángó- because of location)\*
- 12) Newcomer (Hungarian and Csángó)
- 13) Catholic Priest (interviewed 2 x) (Csángó from Moldavia)
- 14) Widow (Csángó)

\*1<sup>st</sup> identified as Hungarian, but later in the interview also identified as Csángó.

### Unrecorded and un-transcribed or inaudible interviews

- 1) Librarian (interviewed 2x) (Romanian)
- 2) Mayor (Romanian)
- 3) Principal at the Romanian School (very adamant Romanian)
- 4) Police Chief (Romanian)
- 5) Pharmacist (Romanian)
- 6) Postal Worker (Romanian)
- 7) Shopkeeper (Romanian)
- 8) Female bank teller (Hungarian)
- 9) Catholic Orphanage Administrator (Hungarian- Dad is Hungarian, mother Romanian, but identifies as Hungarian because he is not from around here (Seckler but *not* Csángó))
- 10) 2: Weaver (Csángó) and Husband (Csángó)
- 11) 2: Roma workers (Csángó, because they live in this region)
- 12) Former train employee/History of trains hobbyist (adamantly Csángó)

Total informants: 30

Romanian: 12      Hungarian only: 3      Hungarian and Csángó: 8      Csángó only: 7

Notes: Often more than one person was interviewed at a time (Husband/Wife situations and Roma) and the Catholic Priest and the Librarian were interviewed twice. Thus, the number of interviews (28) does not equal the number of people for which we have self-identification information. Two of the field study interviews were omitted from this data compilation and research 1) an informal interview with our translator from another villager, and 2) an informal discussion with an amateur Csángó researcher, also not from the village and had lived there a short time.

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